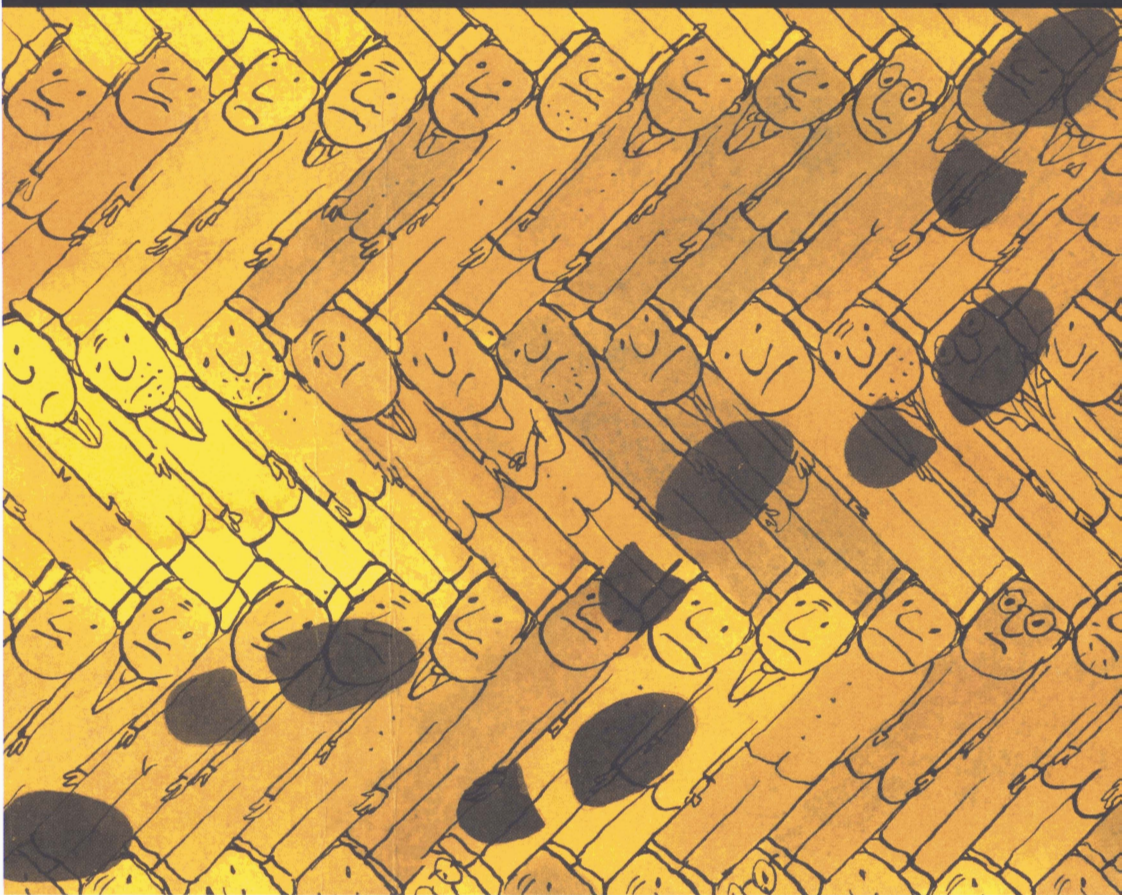


Explaining the Romanian Revolution of 1989

Culture, Structure, and Contingency

Dragoș Petrescu



Editura Enciclopedică
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For Cristina

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INTRODUCTION

The 1989 demise of communist regimes in East-Central Europe (ECE) still poses difficult problems of interpretation, all the more that a series of simple questions have not received yet a convincing answer. For instance: Can one characterize the 1989 events in ECE as revolutions? Is violence an essential element of a revolution? Six countries, i.e. Poland, Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and Romania witnessed a regime change in 1989. Although only the 1989 events in Romania were violent, the revolutionary character of those events was widely contested. When addressing the regime changes of 1989, one of the most difficult tasks is to put forward a viable explanation for an event of historic significance: the final demise of the six communist dictatorships in the above mentioned countries during the same year 1989. This book provides an explanatory model for the collapse of the communist regimes in ECE, applies it consistently to the case of Romania, and answers some crucial questions concerning the causes, nature and outcome of the 1989 events in that country such as: What happened in December 1989 in Romania? Was it a revolution or a more or less concealed coup d'état? If it was a true revolution – inasmuch as the 1989 events in ECE can be characterized as revolutions – why it started in Timișoara, and why precisely in December 1989? Why violence and bloodshed instead of a “negotiated revolution”? The

purpose of the present analysis is to focus on the specificity of the 1989 Romanian revolution and to identify the causes of the sudden demise of the regime on 22 December 1989 at noon. The Romanian communist regime ceased to exist at the very moment when the helicopter that transported the Ceaușescu couple took off from the upper platform of the building of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party at 1208 hours on 22 December 1989. Even more blood was spilled however after 22 December and therefore what happened after that moment represents an equally sad and intriguing story. Simply put, the communist regime in Romania collapsed on 22 December 1989 after protests by the population in several major urban centers, which the regime tried in vain to suppress. How and especially why this happened precisely in December 1989 constitutes a complex problem to which no facile solution exists. It is the purpose of the present book to address such an intricate issue and shed some light on a topic that still needs thorough investigation. The analysis is structured on five chapters.

Chapter 1 provides a comparative analysis of the most significant similarities and differences between the 1989 events and the “classic” revolutions of the modern age. This comparative analysis concludes that the 1989 events in ECE can be termed as revolutions, but a special kind of revolutions because they were non-utopian, non-violent – with the conspicuous exception of Romania, and were not carried out in the name of a particular class. Furthermore, in order to explain the crucial issues of timing, sequence of events, and nature of revolution (negotiated or non-negotiated, violent or non-violent) this author puts forward an explanatory model that takes into consideration both the domestic developments and the entangled histories of the Soviet Bloc countries over the period 1945–1989. This explanatory model combines a culturalist approach with structural analysis, and takes into consideration the issue of contingency. In other words, this book is based on the key concepts of *culture*, *structure*, and *contingency*. The main argument put forward

in Chapter 1 is that the collapse of communist rule in ECE was provoked by an intricate interplay of nation-specific, structural, and conjunctural factors, which ultimately determined the timing, sequence, and nature of those events. Drawing on S. N. Eisenstadt's analysis of the 1989 phenomenon, this work proposes the generic term "postmodern" revolutions when referring to the 1989 breakdown of communist rule in ECE. Two issues have been considered in order to devise a working definition for the 1989 revolutions. First, mass mobilization and protest are regarded as an important precondition of this kind of revolutions. Second, the 1989 revolutionary situation in ECE is seen as different from the classic revolutionary situations in the sense that although an immediate potential for open and fatal violence did exist, violence was rather the exception and not the norm. From these, this author has devised the following working definition of a revolution, which is utilized throughout this work: *A revolution is a rapid and fundamental domestic change in the dominant values and myths of a society, in its political institutions, social structure, leadership, and government activity and policies, following violent or non-violent mass protests.* Having reached a working definition for the 1989 revolutions, the next step is to provide a theoretical model able to explain the demise of the communist regimes in six countries with different cultural-historical and socio-economic backgrounds and characterized by distinct political cultures. Hence, this author introduces the *1989 sequence of collapse* of communist dictatorships in ECE and argues that in 1989 the communist rule in the above-mentioned six countries in ECE collapsed in the following order: Poland, Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Romania.

To paraphrase Timothy Garton Ash, the six communist dictatorships that collapsed throughout the year 1989 need qualifying as much as the revolutions that brought them down. Since variations among the Soviet bloc countries did exist, one has to specify what kind of "modern dictatorships" were the communist dictatorships in

the six countries under discussion. Thus, this author contends that the 1989 sequence of collapse, i.e. Poland – Hungary – East Germany – Czechoslovakia – Bulgaria – Romania, consisted in fact of the demise of three types of communist dictatorships: (1) “national-accommodative” (Poland and Hungary); (2) “welfare” (East Germany and Czechoslovakia); and (3) modernizing-nationalizing (Bulgaria and Romania). The term “national-accommodative” communist dictatorship employed by this author for Poland and Hungary has been coined by Herbert Kitschelt, Zdenka Mansfeldova, Radosław Markowski and Gábor Tóka, who have distinguished between “bureaucratic-authoritarian,” “national-accommodative” and “patrimonial” communist regimes. One can easily observe that the initiation of the 1989 sequence of collapse originated in the camp of “national-accommodative” communist dictatorships, where the 1989 revolutions took the form of “negotiated revolutions” based on the roundtable principle. To characterize the communist dictatorships in East Germany and Czechoslovakia – although the term applies more to the Czech lands than to Slovakia, this author follows Konrad H. Jarausch who has coined the concept of “welfare dictatorship.” As Jarausch has aptly shown in his analysis of former German Democratic Republic (GDR), such regimes were characterized by a fundamental contradiction between “care and coercion.” The demise of the “welfare dictatorships” in East Germany and Czechoslovakia occurred through non-negotiated non-violent revolutions, under the influence of the “negotiated revolutions” in neighboring Poland and Hungary. With regard to Romania and Bulgaria, this author has coined the term *modernizing-nationalizing dictatorships* in order to characterize the communist regimes in those countries. The emphasis on the “dynamic political stance” in this respect is crucial since the communist power elites in both countries perceived their party-states in the making as not completely modern *and* national, and therefore devised policies aimed at spurring industrial development and creating ethnically homogenous “socialist” nations.

Having defined the 1989 sequence of collapse of state socialism in ECE, the discussion further concentrates on the theoretical model meant to provide a causal explanation for the inception, unfolding, and outcome of the 1989 revolutions. This model is based on the three categories mentioned above, i.e. structure, culture, and contingency. According to the said model, the 1989 revolutions were determined by a complicated and, sometimes, perplexing aggregation of *structural*, *nation-specific* and *conjunctural* factors. These factors operated and interacted in various ways in each of the countries analyzed, but they were nevertheless present in each case. Such a model is able to accommodate issues of path-dependency, patterns of compliance and contestation under communist rule and questions of interdependence at both international and Soviet Bloc level. The particular way in which the above-mentioned factors aggregated determined eventually the nature of the revolution in each of the cases discussed, i.e. negotiated or non-negotiated, peaceful or violent, as well as the order in which the six communist dictatorships were overthrown. Ole Nørgaard and Steven L. Sampson have inspired this kind of analysis focusing on three types of factors, namely, structural, nation-specific, and conjunctural. Thus, in their study “Poland’s Crisis and East European Socialism,” published in 1984, Nørgaard and Sampson have explained the birth of the Polish Solidarity as an outcome of social and cultural factors.

Chapter 2 addresses the peculiarities of the Romanian case and discusses the conflicting representations of the Romanian revolution in post-communism and the importance of a thorough event-centered reconstruction of the rapidly unfolding events in December 1989. Conflicting perceptions and recollections by direct participants, as well as by simple bystanders, led to the appearance of an enduring “Rashomon effect” in terms of public representations of the 1989 violent regime change in post-communism. The Romanian revolution of 1989 was probably the most contested of all the 1989 revolutions in ECE, although it was the only one that possessed the

main ingredients of a true, classic revolution, i.e. “violence, bloodshed and tyrannicide” – as J. F. Brown wonderfully put it. Thus, Chapter 2 is structured on two parts. The first part addresses the main interpretations of the 1989 regime change in Romania, including a brief episode of *ego-histoire*, in order to illustrate the enduring “Rashomon effect” that characterizes the general process of reflecting on the December 1989 events in this country. To paraphrase the title of a Romanian feature film directed by Corneliu Porumboiu and released in 2006, the disarmingly simple question “Was it or not a true revolution?” epitomizes the controversial nature of the Romanian revolution of 1989. The second part of this chapter provides a concise event-centered historical reconstruction of the December 1989 events in Timișoara and Bucharest based primarily on the recollections of the participants to those events. The historical reconstruction provided here, which does not pretend to be comprehensive, is meant to illustrate the fact that people in the street perceived the 1989 events as revolutionary. Numerous protesters were convinced that a revolution was sparked under their eyes and wanted to take part to it. It is also true that “what happened afterwards,” i.e. the coming to power of the second- and third- rank apparatchiks in the immediate aftermath of the regime change, changed the view of large segments of the population of “what went before,” i.e. in December 1989.

The explanatory model presented above is applied consistently to the Romanian case beginning with Chapter 3. This chapter discusses the “structural” factors, i.e. those factors characteristic to all Soviet-type societies: *economic decline* and *ideological decay*. In terms of *economic decline*, this work addresses the economic performance of the communist regime in Romania over the period 1945–1989 in order to illustrate the relationship between the severe economic crisis in the 1980s and the growing potential for social protest. Although Romania faced the most severe crisis among the six countries that experienced a regime change in 1989, it was the last to exit from

communism that year. One can explain such a paradoxical situation by considering the mechanism of rising expectations and setbacks that characterized the Ceaușescu period. Apart from the industrialization process initiated by the regime, a civilizing process did take place under state socialism in Romania, which resulted in some improvements with regard to urbanization and housing, spread of education and sanitation, transportation and increased mobility by the population during the 1960s and 1970s. The severe crisis of the 1980s however paved in many respects the way for the bloody revolution of 1989. Due to the miseries of everyday life, the potential for protest of a majority of the population was particularly high in the late 1980s. Major policy decisions regarding the economic development and implicitly the “socialist modernization” of the country under communist rule were made in accordance with the external constraints and the political goals of the local power elite. Thus, the period 1945–1989 has been divided into four distinct periods that represent different stages in the complicated relationship between politics and economics under communist rule in Romania. These four periods are defined as follows: (1) humble imitation of the Soviet model, 1945–1956; (2) development and emancipation, 1956–1964; (3) closely-watched relaxation, 1964–1977; and (4) crisis and decline, 1977–1989. Chapter 3 also addresses two issues that illustrate the relationship between the economic decline and the final demise of the Romanian communism.

A first issue is that of the achievements of the so-called “golden epoch” of Romanian communism. That epoch determined a sharp rise in the expectations of an overwhelming majority of the population with regard to their personal development, as well as to that of the Romanian society in general. Many authors conventionally place that period between 1964 and 1971, i.e. from the issuance of the Declaration of April 1964 to the issuance of the Theses of July 1971. Nevertheless, this work argues that one should consider the period 1964–1977, i.e. the period spanning from the issuance of the

Declaration of April 1964 to the sparking of the strike organized on 2–3 August 1977 by the miners in the Jiu Valley basin. In 1964, the bold strategy of political survival, based on independence from Moscow and extensive industrialization, devised by Gheorghiu-Dej and his men took a definite form. The year 1977 is important because two major events that took place that year signaled that the “tacit deal” between the Ceaușescu regime and the Romanian society ended. Chronologically, the first event was the initiation of the Goma Human Rights Movement. Initiated by writer Paul Goma, and known since as the Goma Movement, it lasted three months (February–April 1977) and was the most articulated large-scale dissident action in communist Romania. The second major event was the above-mentioned strike organized by the Jiu Valley miners, which due to its characteristics – it was a round-the-clock, non-violent, occupation strike – constituted the first mature working class protest in communist Romania. Another event, both tragic and unexpected, is usually neglected by conventional analyses of Romanian communism: the terrible earthquake of 4 March 1977. Nevertheless, that particular earthquake had a great impact on Romania’s economic performance and contributed decisively to the economic downturn of the late 1970s and the early 1980s.

A second issue is that of the severe economic crisis of the period 1981–1989. The food shortages and the power cuts of the 1980s were by no means the only causes of the bloody revolution in Romania. However, the everyday miseries were among the causes of the popular revolt that sparked the 1989 revolution in this country. In a command economy, the central planner decides upon the separation of national income into accumulation and consumption. Therefore, the crucial decision about the size of accumulation is political. During the 1980s, the developmental pattern imposed by the Ceaușescu regime continued to favor primary and secondary sectors with a strong emphasis on coal mining as well as on steel, heavy machinery and petrochemical industries. These sectors however were unable to produce competitive goods for export, especially for

the Western markets. While these sectors were unable to compete on the international markets, their functioning required a high level of energy consumption that led to an endemic energy crisis in industry. On top of this, Ceaușescu became obsessed with paying back the external debt of the country and consequently imposed a heavy burden on agriculture, as one of the few producers of exportable goods. The erroneous economic strategy devised by the regime in the late 1960s was pursued unabatedly, in spite of unfavorable international and domestic conjunctures. Throughout the 1980s, instead of introducing economic reforms the regime imposed harsh rationing measures that affected primarily the population. These measures concentrated on the rationing of energy consumption (e.g. power supply for household use, gasoline for private cars etc.), of food supplies (food rationing was introduced in the early 1980s), and of basic consumer goods (e.g. soap, toothpaste, detergents etc.). Thus, by the late 1980s the mistaken economic policy of the Ceaușescu regime forced a large majority of the population to think in terms of sheer biological survival. Such an economic strategy led to both absolute and relative deprivation, which affected a great majority of the population and contributed significantly to the final demise of the Romanian communist regime.

Ideological decay or the erosion of ideology was a phenomenon that other communist regimes in ECE experienced after Nikita Khrushchev presented his “secret report” to the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU on the night of 24–25 February 1956. According to Kołakowski, Khrushchev’s exposure of the abuses committed by Stalin represented a true ideological shock: “De-Stalinization proved to be a virus from which Communism never recovered.” The “secret speech” in which the Soviet communist leader attacked Stalin’s personality cult did have a major impact on the communist regimes in Poland and Hungary. Actually, the utopian goal of building radically new societies throughout Sovietized Europe received a definitive blow with the sparking of the Hungarian Revolution in October 1956. In the case of Romania, an ideology that never

appealed to the Romanian society – as Mihai Botez aptly observed – simply could not enter a process of decay. Although Marxism-Leninism never truly appealed to the Romanian society, the regime was able to make use of nationalism as an ideological substitute, which, especially from 1968 onwards, served as ideological “cement” for the Romanian ethnic majority and legitimized the rule of the Romanian Communist Party (RCP).

Ceaușescu turned Gheorghiu-Dej’s incipient nationalism into a comprehensive nation-building process aimed at creating an ethnically homogenous “socialist nation” in Romania. The invasion of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO) troops on the night of 20 to 21 August 1968 gave the RCP the opportunity to evaluate the force of the nationalistic argument. When Ceaușescu publicly condemned the crushing of the Prague Spring by the Soviet-led troops of the WTO, the RCP gained widespread popular support almost overnight. Afterwards, Ceaușescu’s nationalism acted as ideological “cement” on the background of an obvious popular distrust for Marxism-Leninism. It was only in the conditions of the deep economic crisis of the 1980s and, even more importantly, in the conditions of the radical change of policy in Moscow after the coming to power of Mikhail Gorbachev that “Ceaușescuism,” as an ideological substitute for Marxism-Leninism, entered in a terminal crisis. After 1985, when large segments of the Romanian society began to look to Moscow in the hope of persuading the Ceaușescu regime to improve their living standards, *independence from Moscow* – the cornerstone of the RCP legitimacy in the post-1968 period – ceased to appeal to a majority of the people. After the launch of Gorbachev’s program of reforms, emancipation from the Soviet Union meant nothing for the Romanian population as long as Moscow became suddenly synonymous with restructuring and openness, and independent Romania was heading towards disaster. In this sense, ideological decay, understood as the demise of Ceaușescu’s *national-communism* as an ersatz ideology, contributed significantly to the collapse of the communist rule in Romania.

Chapter 4 discusses the issue of *contingency* and argues that conjunctural factors played an important role in the final demise of the communist rule in Romania. The present analysis concentrates on two kinds of *conjunctural factors*, i.e. external and internal. Given the nature of the power relations between Moscow and its European satellites, an external factor – which might be called the “Kremlin factor” – always influenced the decisions made by the power elites in Sovietized Europe. Until the mid-1980s, the “Kremlin factor” was synonymous with the involvement of Moscow in the domestic affairs of the “fraternal” countries in ECE, as it was the case in Hungary in 1956 or in Czechoslovakia in 1968. Once Mikhail Gorbachev came to power and engaged in a bold program of reforms, the “Kremlin factor” evolved into the “Gorbachev factor” and became synonymous with restructuring and openness. At the same time, unexpected events of historic significance or crucial decisions made by the Western powers contributed considerably to the demise of communist dictatorships in ECE. For instance, the election of a Polish Pope in 1978 was a major external factor that contributed to the collapse of communism in Poland. Furthermore, the Polish Roundtable Agreements concluded on 5 April 1989 initiated the “snowball effect,” which lasted until 22 December 1989 when the Romanian communism was brought down by a violent revolution. In the same vein, the determination of the American President Ronald Reagan to establish a high-tech spatial weapon system forced the Soviet Union to invest more in weaponry, which weakened it economically and thus contributed indirectly to the breakdown of the communist regimes in Sovietized Europe.

The communist dictatorships in ECE proved to be particularly vulnerable to *external* conjunctural factors. Obviously, one has to assess the influence of such factors on the six countries that experienced a regime change in 1989 on a case-by-case basis. For instance, the Polish “negotiated revolution” initiated the “snowball effect” that had a considerable influence on the final demise of the communist regimes in Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia,

Bulgaria, and Romania. Thus, the Polish case poses difficult problems of interpretation with regard to the set of external conjunctural factors that contributed to the demise of the communist regime exactly because a most powerful one, i.e. the “snowball effect” was not present. As for the case of Romania, this work contends that two external conjunctural factors were of paramount importance in the collapse of communism in this country: (1) the “Gorbachev factor;” and (2) the “snowball effect.” Considering the reaction by the overwhelming majority of the population in December 1989, the present analysis has examined the role played by the international media in keeping alive, or even developing, a spirit of opposition towards the regime in communist Romania. It was about an intricate historical process that by the end of the 1980s led a large majority of the population listen to the information broadcast in Romanian by international radio stations. The Romanian communist regime also proved to be vulnerable in terms of domestic conjuncture. The *internal* conjunctural factors, however, contributed to a lesser extent to the final demise of the regime. A major internal conjunctural factor was the coming of age of the 1967–1969 generation that originated in the policy of forced natality launched by Ceaușescu after his coming to power in 1965.

Chapter 5 concentrates on the *nation-specific factors*. The examination of this set of factors entails a discussion on political cultures at both *regime* and *community* level. In the end, this chapter argues, these factors were responsible for the position Romania occupied within the 1989 sequence of collapse as well as for the violent nature of the revolution in this country. The analysis addresses the attitudinal and behavioral patterns that characterize the relationship between regime and society, which emerged as result of the successive transformations of the Stalinist model imposed on the Romanian society in the immediate aftermath of World War II. These transformations took place under certain constraints imposed by the Soviet policy towards the “fraternal” countries in ECE in the general Cold War context, of which the Brezhnev Doctrine was

perhaps the most significant for the purpose of this analysis. This author identifies five main periods that characterize the relationship between the communist regime and the Romanian society in general over the period 1945–1989: (1) “revolution from above,” 1945–1956; (2) “community-building,” 1956–1964; (3) transition from “community-building” to nation-building, 1964–1968; (4) fully-fledged nation-building, 1968–1985; and (5) disenchantment and de-legitimation, 1985–1989. Throughout these five periods, two processes interacted permanently. On the one hand, the regime applied consistent policies meant to tame and subsequently co-opt the population. On the other hand, the population reacted to these policies in various ways ranging from collaboration to open conflict with the regime. The attitudinal and behavioral patterns that resulted from the complex interaction of these processes determined ultimately both the nature and timing of the Romanian revolution of 1989.

The Stalinist mindset of the Romanian power elite went gradually through a series of transformations after 1956, in the aftermath of Khrushchev’s condemnation of Stalin’s personality cult. Threatened by de-Stalinization, Gheorghiu-Dej and his men devised the strategy of political survival that was not centered from the very beginning on a skillful instrumentalization of nationalism. Once Khrushchev inaugurated his de-Stalinization campaign, Romanian communists had to look elsewhere for legitimacy and thus initiated a process of “selective community-building.” In other words, they engaged in a process of creating new political meanings, shared by the communist ruling elite and the population, concerning the relationship between the Party and the society. The 1956 political developments at the Soviet bloc level imposed the devising of a new political strategy by the power elite in Bucharest. The selective nature of the community building process launched in the aftermath of the 1956 events needs to be stressed once more. Not all the segments of Romanian society were allowed to take part in the process. Up to the year 1964, numerous Romanian citizens were imprisoned on political grounds while their offspring were denied basic civil rights. Obviously, they

were considered “enemies of the people” and the community building process was not aimed at them. De-Stalinization was a threat to Gheorghiu-Dej and his men, and a return to the people as the ultimate source of legitimacy was the only solution at hand. This is how a worldview developed within the ranks of the illegal RCP during the interwar years and subsequently in Greater Romania’s prisons was subsequently extended to the Party-State level. Marginalization, humiliation, external control, reliance only on the inner circle of power, made of *monolithism* and *emancipation* fundamental values shared by Gheorghiu-Dej and his inner circle of power. Gheorghiu-Dej’s recourse to Party-State building in the guise of “selective community building” created the basis for Ceaușescu’s program of Party-State building in the form of an all-embracing nation-building project.

Monolithism of the Party and emancipation from Moscow, as key features of the regime political culture, are largely responsible for the violent nature of the Romanian revolution of 1989. The most notable protest from within the nomenklatura occurred very late, i.e. only on 14 March 1989, when the open letter signed by six former high-rank officials of the Party – Gheorghe Apostol, Alexandru Bârlădeanu, Silviu Brucan, Corneliu Mănescu, Constantin Pârvulescu and Grigore Răceanu – was broadcast by Radio Free Europe. The letter, addressed to Ceaușescu, began with an indictment of his mistaken policies. It was for the first time in communist Romania that former top Party officials were publicly criticizing Ceaușescu’s policies. Among the signatories were Pârvulescu and Brucan, who had already criticized the Ceaușescu regime. The others were communist personalities such as Alexandru Bârlădeanu and Corneliu Mănescu, who proved themselves in international politics during the 1960s and 1970s, as well as Gheorghe Apostol, who had been Gheorghiu-Dej’s oldest collaborator. Less known was Grigore Răceanu, an old-timer purged by Gheorghiu-Dej in 1958. The “letter of the six” marked a watershed in the history of the RCP. On the one hand, the letter of the six represented the first major split at the level of the RCP elite. For the first time since the 1957 split at the top – the Constantinescu-

Chişinevschi episode, the monolithism of the RCP was broken and a major faction of the nomenklatura openly protested against Ceauşescu's lead. On the other hand, the signatories of the letter were already retired when RFE broadcast the text and their links with the Party were practically severed. In this respect, the letter came too late and therefore had an insignificant impact on RCP's domestic policies. In other words, the "mortal sin" of factionalism was committed too late to avoid a bloody revolution in 1989.

In what concerns the legitimating power of nationalism, after the coming to power of Gorbachev in 1985 the Ceauşescu regime was left with a sole target: the Hungarian minority in Romania. Thus, on 20 December 1989 Ceauşescu affirmed that the revolt in Timişoara, which sparked the Romanian revolution, was the result of the activity of "hooligan elements, working together with reactionary, imperialistic, irredentist, chauvinistic circles ... aiming at the territorial dismemberment of Romania." Ceauşescu was hinting, among others, at neighboring Hungary and the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, the new image of the Soviet Union among Romania's population deeply undermined the propagandistic efforts of the regime. In the late 1980s, independence from Moscow ceased to be a major source of legitimacy for the communist regime in Romania. By 1989, the Romanian polity was definitely split into *us* and *them*. As for *them* – the inner circle of power around the Ceauşescu couple – they displayed a high level of cohesion, the highest among the six countries that compose the 1989 sequence of collapse, up to the very end of the regime. This explains in many respects why Romania occupies the last position, the sixth, in the said sequence. At the same time, to paraphrase the statement of a Romanian top communist official, *independence* ceased to be *their* legitimacy and this permitted popular protest to grow and spread across Romania in December 1989. It was because the RCP discourse centered on independence from Moscow lost its legitimating power in the eyes of a majority of the population that Romania was eventually able to exit from communism in 1989.

With regard to community political culture, which has been termed as the *political culture(s) of resistance*, Chapter 5 analyzes patterns of intellectual dissent and working-class protest. Some authors have argued that the failure of the Goma movement for human rights epitomizes the entire story of Romanian dissent. Speaking about the Romanian dissidence in the 1970s, a Western specialist in East European affairs affirmed in the early 1980s that: "Romanian dissent lives in Paris and his name is Paul Goma." This seems to be true since after Goma the other radical dissidents of the 1980s, such as Doina Cornea, Dorin Tudoran, Radu Filipescu, Gabriel Andreescu or Dan Petrescu, experienced a similar loneliness of radical dissidence. Group protests developed only slowly towards the end of the 1980s and replaced timidly the isolated dissident acts by courageous individuals. In November 1989, dissident Dan Petrescu initiated a campaign of collecting signatures against the reelection of Ceaușescu at the Fourteenth Congress of the RCP. Petrescu, who was living in the Moldavian city of Iași, contacted Doina Cornea, who was living in the Transylvanian city of Cluj. It was for the first time when prominent dissidents were trying to organize a joint action against the regime. Another story, which is telling of the efforts and vacillations of the intellectuals who felt that they should do something to protest against the communist rule, is that of the "letter of the eighteen." According to writer Stelian Tănase, the idea of writing a letter of protest against the cultural policies of the regime emerged during a discussion he had with Alexandru Paleologu, an intellectual from an older generation imprisoned on political grounds in the late 1950s. It took until mid-December to collect the signatures and transmit the letter abroad. Nevertheless, the fact that eighteen intellectuals eventually managed to become solidary in their protest in the autumn of 1989 indicates that something had changed by that time: a timid but shared feeling of solidarity was gradually replacing the "egoism of small groups." It was, however, too late for a dissident movement to take shape and give birth to a political opposition able to fill the power vacuum in

the afternoon of 22 December 1989. What some intellectuals managed to do that day was to speak to the large crowds gathered in the Palace Square in downtown Bucharest and argue forcefully and convincingly that the monopoly of the RCP was over. In other words, they told the people that it was not about an anti-Ceaușescu uprising, but about an anti-Communist revolution. Although short-lived, that was an important moment of the 1989 Romanian revolution.

A key issue concerning the political cultures of resistance refers to the working-class revolts and the process of establishing a cross-class alliance against the communist regime. This work distinguishes between “genuine” workers and peasant-workers and takes into consideration the development of distinct subcultures of resistance against the regime due to the particular situation in which each of these categories of workers found itself throughout the 1970s and 1980s. “Genuine” workers represented a category of workers that severed their roots with countryside, moved to towns where they were employed mostly in industry, and thus were dependent on the salary they received. By the end of 1980s, in the conditions of the severe crisis faced by the Ceaușescu regime, this category of workers was increasingly forced to think in terms of biological survival and thus was more prone to engage in open protests. Peasant-workers were less affected by the economic crisis. During the period of food shortages, i.e. 1981–1989, such people were able to obtain the necessary foodstuffs for survival and thus their potential for protest was lower. The peasant-worker is a good example of a strategy of the individual to survive in the conditions of a severe crisis: a job in industry in the nearby town, and food supplies from the little farm he or she owned in the village. However, such a strategy became less successful after the introduction of a strict system of quotas and increased control by the authorities of the output of the small individual farms.

“Genuine” workers represented the first and most affected segment of society in the conditions of economic crisis. Beginning in the mid-1970s four large and highly industrialized areas of communist

Romania – the counties of Constanța, Brașov, Hunedoara, and Timiș – attracted the largest number of internal migrants in the country, many of whom came from remote and less developed regions of Moldavia. In these areas, as the interregional long distance migration figures show, came into being a relatively numerous class of workers relying only on the salary they received in industry – a class of “genuine” workers. Again, the term “genuine” has to be understood in the sense of a category of workers almost entirely dependent on the salary received in industry and not in the sense of worker-father origins. Until the late 1970s, the category of “genuine” workers benefited from the policy of industrialization and urbanization enforced by the communist regime. Beginning in the late 1970s, however, the same category of workers proved to be the most vulnerable in face of the deep economic crisis. Between 1977 and 1989, the most important protests from below occurred in workplaces where “genuine” workers constituted a majority: in the Jiu Valley (Hunedoara County) in 1977 and in Brașov (the capital of the Brașov County) in 1987. In the late 1980s there were in Romania four highly industrialized urban areas – the counties of Constanța, Brașov, Hunedoara, and Timiș – where the number of workers coming from other regions of the country was particularly high. When the structural crisis deepened, the “genuine” workers in those areas were severely affected by food shortages, strict rationing, and non-payment of wages, and were thus forced to think in terms of biological survival. It was in one of these areas, i.e. the city of Timișoara, the capital of the Timiș County, that the Romanian revolution of 1989 was sparked. This happened also because Timișoara was one of the very few urban centers where the conditions for the appearance of a broad, though short-lived, cross-class alliance were present.

Chapter 1

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The 1989 Events Revolutions or Mere “Revolutions”?

Much has been written on the significance of the 1989 regime changes in East-Central Europe (ECE). Their unexpected inception, convoluted unfolding and ambiguous outcome have been heavily discussed and debated. Theories and pseudo-theories have been put forward, and a variety of hypotheses and concepts supported one another or clashed vigorously. Scholars and laypeople alike attempted at making sense of those events and assessing their regional and global significance, and eventually proclaimed their revolutionary character. One might argue that those events took almost everybody by surprise, and this is why there were so numerous those who believed they were “true” revolutions. Many accepted that in 1989 the countries of “actually existing socialism” in ECE experienced a revolutionary situation. At the same time, it was exactly the revolutionary nature of the 1989 events that has been often contested, if not utterly denied. Some maintained that the 1989 events do not qualify as a genuine revolution on the model of the great modern revolutions such as the French or the Russian. Violence, it was argued, is the fundamental characteristic of a revolution and therefore the 1989 regime changes in ECE were not “true” revolutions for the very simple reason that violence was almost non-existent, with the obvious exception of Romania. This chapter puts forward a frame of analysis for explaining

the 1989 events in ECE. When analyzing the revolutions of 1989, one is compelled to address three fundamental issues related to their inception, unfolding and outcome, which can be summarized as follows: (1) timing; (2) sequence of events; and (3) nature of regime changes. In other words, one has to provide a convincing answer to the following questions: (1) Why those revolutions occurred precisely in 1989? (2) Why the communist regimes in ECE collapsed in that particular order? and (3) Why some of the 1989 regime changes were negotiated, others were non-negotiated but non-violent, and only one of them was violent? This chapter opens with a discussion on the problems of definition one faces when examining the 1989 events in ECE and addresses the most significant similarities and differences between those events and the “classic” revolutions of the modern age. The argument put forward is that the 1989 events in ECE can be termed as revolutions, but a particular kind of revolutions, i.e. “postmodern” revolutions, because they were non-utopian, non-violent – with the conspicuous exception of Romania, and were not carried out in the name of a particular class. Furthermore, this chapter provides an explanatory model that takes into consideration both the domestic developments and the entangled histories of the Soviet Bloc countries over the period 1945–1989 in order to discuss the crucial issues of timing, sequence of events and nature of revolution (negotiated or non-negotiated, violent or non-violent). The general model proposed for explaining such issues is based on *path-dependency*, *agency* and *contingency*, and the main assumption is that the collapse of communist rule in ECE was provoked by an intricate and sometimes unexpected interplay of structural, conjunctural and nation-specific factors, which ultimately determined the timing, sequence, and nature of those events.

Understanding 1989 by Analogy

A simple and direct way of making sense of the nature of the 1989 events in ECE would be to compare them with the classic revolutions. As Krishan Kumar has suggested, a way of understanding 1989 is “by analogy.”¹ Therefore, this section concentrates on the debates over the revolutionary nature of the year 1989 in ECE focusing primarily on three major elements that were generally considered key issues when comparing the “great,” “classic” revolutions of the modern age – such as the French or the Russian revolutions, with the 1989 events in ECE: revolutionary ideology, class character and violent nature. Therefore, a first issue that deserves further examination is related to the idea of a “new beginning” that characterized the classic revolutions. Thus, in her classic study of revolutions, Hannah Arendt has argued that the modern concept of revolution is “inextricably bound up with the notion that the course of history suddenly begins anew, that an entirely new story, a story never known or told before is about to unfold.”² Furthermore, Arendt argues that a crucial element in understanding modern revolutions is that “the idea of freedom and the experience of a new beginning should coincide.”³ If one examines the claims by 1989 revolutionaries throughout ECE, one finds out that in terms of revolutionary ideology the 1989 events proved to be rather restorative, in the sense that the forces that stayed behind the regime changes did not want to engage in new utopian experiments. Many of the participants in the 1989 events simply envisaged a return to normality, a “normality” that was generally perceived as that of the affluent “capitalistic”

¹ Krishan Kumar, *1989: Revolutionary Ideas and Ideals* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 39.

² Hannah Arendt, *On Revolutions* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 28; orig. publ. 1963.

³ Arendt, *On Revolutions*, 29.

societies, and certainly not that of “actually existing socialism.” As Gale Stokes aptly put it, what happened in 1989 was “not a revolution of total innovation, like the great classic revolutions, but rather the shucking off of a failed experiment in favor of an already existing model, pluralist democracy.”⁴ One can go even further and argue that many of the ordinary people that poured into the streets of the major cities of Sovietized Europe in 1989 were fascinated by the image – amply idealized, to be sure – of the prosperous West. People simply wanted to live better, and it was quite clear that the communist regimes were not able to provide for their populations in this respect. Robert Darnton, who witnessed the fall of state socialism in East Germany while spending the academic year 1989–90 at the *Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin*, remembers the discussion he had with an East German intellectual in Halle immediately after the *Wende*: “Colleague D leaned over and looked hard into my face: ‘Two systems have competed for almost a half a century,’ he said. ‘Which has won?’ He gave the answer in English: ‘*The American way of life* [emphasis added].”⁵

Thus, the year 1989 in ECE was marked by a clear tendency of rejecting grand, utopian projects. As Kumar noted: “The ‘pathos of novelty’ that Hannah Arendt saw as the hallmark of modern revolution has been conspicuously absent. Far from it, the revolution of 1989 has displayed something like nostalgia for the achievements of past revolutions. *It did not wish to go forward; it wished to go back* [emphasis added].”⁶ In a similar vein, Samuel N. Eisenstadt observed: “There was no totalistic, utopian vision rooted in eschatological expectations of a new type of society. The vision or visions

⁴ Gale Stokes, *The Walls Came Tumbling Down: The Collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 260.

⁵ Robert Darnton, *Berlin Journal, 1989–1990* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1991), 192.

⁶ Kumar, 1989, 40.

promulgated in Central and Eastern Europe, calling for freedom from repressive totalitarian or authoritarian regimes, relied on various pragmatic adjustments.”⁷ Such a rejection of utopian ideas made a prominent theorist of the French revolution, François Furet, to assert that “not a single new idea has come out of Eastern Europe in 1989.”⁸ The backward-looking aspect of 1989 has not escaped to an astute thinker like Jürgen Habermas, who coined the term “rectifying revolution” when referring to the 1989 events in ECE. According to Habermas, what happened in 1989 was a “revolution that is to some degree flowing backwards, one that clears the ground in order to catch up with developments previously missed out.”⁹

A second issue that needs clarification concerns the class character of the 1989 events. Turning back to the modern revolutions and comparing the 1989 events in ECE with the “classic,” “bourgeois” French Revolution of 1789, one should ask oneself to what extent the events in 1989 constituted a social revolution. The concept of social revolution has been employed by Theda Skocpol in her comparative analysis of the French, Russian and Chinese revolutions. According to Skocpol, social revolutions are “rapid, basic transformations of a society’s state and class structures; and they are accompanied and in part carried through by class-based revolts from below.”¹⁰ Mass mobilization has been a fundamental pre-condition for the 1989 regime changes in ECE. As Habermas observed: “The presence of large masses gathering in squares and mobilizing on the

⁷ See S. N. Eisenstadt, “The Breakdown of Communist Regimes,” in Vladimir Tismăneanu, ed., *The Revolutions of 1989* (London: Routledge, 1999), 93; orig. publ. 1992.

⁸ Quoted in Christian Joppke, *East German Dissidents and the Revolution of 1989: Social Movement in a Leninist Regime* (Houndmills, UK: Macmillan, 1995), 133.

⁹ Quoted in Kumar, *1989*, 40.

¹⁰ Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 4.

streets managed, astoundingly, to disempower a regime that was armed to the teeth.”¹¹ Nevertheless, in the case of the 1989 events in ECE, the class character of the revolts from below is seriously questionable. In this respect, Eisenstadt noted: “It would be difficult to say whether these were bourgeois or proletarian revolutions. Even in respect to the classical revolutions, these definitions are not always helpful or enlightening; in respect to the events in Eastern Europe they are meaningless.”¹² The same author further asserted: “If there were specific social sectors predominant in bringing down [the communist regimes], they included some intellectuals, certain potential professionals, sometimes abetted by workers, who did not appear to be the bearers of any very strong class consciousness.”¹³ To sum up, one can speak of determined crowds that poured into the streets of the major cities in ECE and thus contributed significantly to the breakdown of communist rule in the respective countries, but not of a particular, self-conscious class that carried out the 1989 transformations.

Third, revolutionary violence represents a crucial aspect that deserves further discussion when comparing the “classic” revolutions with the events in 1989. Charles Tilly, a prominent theorist of social change, stresses the use of force as intrinsically linked with the idea of revolution. According to Tilly, a revolution is: “*A forcible transfer of power* over a state in the course of which at least two distinct blocs of contenders make incompatible claims to control the state, and some significant portion of the population subject to the state’s jurisdiction acquiesces in the claims of each bloc [emphasis added].”¹⁴ Nonetheless, if violence represents an indispensable ingredient of a “true” revolution, then none of the 1989 regime changes that took place in Poland, Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia or Bulgaria

¹¹ Quoted in Kumar, 1989, 41.

¹² Eisenstadt, “The Breakdown of Communist Regimes,” 91.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Charles Tilly, *European Revolutions, 1492–1992* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 8.

could be termed as revolutions. Ironically enough, if one employs such a perspective, then only the events in Romania could be described as a “genuine” revolution. It is worth mentioning that there were quite numerous those who were initially impressed by the December 1989 situation in Romania. Timothy Garton Ash, for instance, wrote at the time: “Nobody hesitated to call what happened in Romania a revolution. After all, it really looked like one: angry crowds on the streets, tanks, government buildings in flames, the dictator put up against a wall and shot.”¹⁵ However, what happens after a certain event could change dramatically our perspective on that event, and this is exactly what happened with regard to the 1989 events in Romania. Consequently, in his concluding remarks to a major international conference dedicated to the celebration of ten years from the “miraculous year” 1989, Garton Ash stated bluntly: “Curiously enough the moment when people in the West finally thought there was a revolution was when they saw television pictures of Romania: crowds, tanks, shooting, blood in the streets. They said: ‘That – we know *that* is a revolution,’ and of course the joke is that it was the only one that wasn’t [original emphasis].”¹⁶

True, the Romanian case remains the most controversial since the events in that country contradicted the non-violent, peaceful character of the 1989 revolutions in ECE. However, it was exactly the Romanian revolution “that wasn’t” which added to the revolutionary year 1989 the missing elements of “classic” revolutions. These elements, as J. F. Brown has perceptively argued, were: violence, bloodshed and tyrannicide.¹⁷ At the same time, Garton Ash was not

¹⁵ Timothy Garton Ash, *The Magic Lantern: The Revolution of '89 Witnessed in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin and Prague* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 20; orig. publ. 1990.

¹⁶ See Timothy Garton Ash, “Conclusions” to Sorin Antohi and Vladimir Tismăneanu, eds., *Between Past and Future: The Revolutions of 1989 and Their Aftermath* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2000), 395.

¹⁷ J. F. Brown, *Surge to Freedom: The End of Communist Rule in Eastern Europe* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 1.

alone in denying the revolutionary nature of the 1989 events in Romania. Numerous foreign and Romanian authors, disillusioned with the slow pace of the post-1989 transition to democracy, have expressed the idea of a questionable 1989 revolution in Romania by using the word revolution in quotation marks.¹⁸ To conclude this part, it may be argued that a majority of the authors who addressed the 1989 regime changes in ECE agreed more or less to the idea that those events constituted revolutions, but a special kind of revolutions. The next section discusses the unusual nature of the 1989 revolutions and argues in favor of defining them as “postmodern” revolutions.

The Revolutions of 1989: “Postmodern” Revolutions?

As shown above, when talking of the revolutions of 1989, a major problem of definition arises when one attempts at comparing them with the “classic” revolutions. Thus, there are at least three main differences between the 1989 events in ECE and the “great” revolutions in the sense that the revolutions of 1989 were neither utopian, nor violent, and did not have a class character. These substantial differences notwithstanding, would it be still possible to speak of the “revolutions of 1989”? As an astute witness and critic of the 1989 phenomenon, Garton Ash confessed that there is indeed a problem of assessing “in what sense this was a revolution” and aptly observed: “In fact *we always have to qualify it*; we call it ‘velvet,’ we call it ‘peaceful,’ we call it ‘evolutionary,’ someone ... calls it ‘rebirth’ not revolution, I call it ‘refolution’ [emphasis added].”¹⁹ The term

¹⁸ See, for instance, Adrian Marino, “Triptic” (Triptych), in Iordan Chimet, ed., *Momentul adevărului* (The moment of truth) (Cluj: Editura Dacia, 1996), 312; and Olivier Gillet, *Religion et nationalisme: L’Idéologie de l’Eglise orthodoxe roumaine sous le régime communiste* (Brussels: Editions de l’Université de Bruxelles, 1997), 132.

¹⁹ Garton Ash, “Conclusions” to Antohi and Tismăneanu, eds., *Between Past and Future*, 395.

refolution was able to grasp the intricate mixture of revolution and reform, as well as the gradual and negotiated nature of the fundamental changes that took place in Poland and Hungary and initiated the changes of 1989 throughout ECE. As Garton Ash puts it: "It was in fact, a mixture of reform and revolution. At the time, I called it 'refolution.' There was a strong and essential element of change 'from above,' led by an enlightened minority in the still ruling communist parties. But there was also a vital element of popular pressure 'from below.'"²⁰ The blend of reform and revolution, he further points out, differed from one country to another: "In Hungary, there was rather more of the former, in Poland of the latter, yet in both countries the story was that of an interaction between the two. The interaction was, however, largely mediated by negotiations between ruling and opposition elites."²¹

The first phase of the 1989 revolutions consisted of the "peaceful revolutions" in Poland in Hungary. It should be stressed from the outset that the crucial element of the Polish inception and the subsequent Hungarian ensuing of the 1989 wave of political changes in ECE was the *roundtable principle* observed in both countries by the communist power elites and the opposition groups. The Polish Roundtable Talks, which lasted from February to April, concluded with an agreement that recognized the legal right of Solidarity to exist and thus inaugurated the revolutionary year 1989. As Adam Michnik noted: "The Round Table signified a willingness to transform what had been a policeman's monologue into a political dialogue."²² The term "negotiated revolutions" is perhaps the most appropriate to characterize the 1989 regime changes in Poland and Hungary. As Rudolf L. Tökés pointed out in his path-breaking

²⁰ Garton Ash, *The Magic Lantern*, 14.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Adam Michnik, "A Specter Is Haunting Europe," in idem, *Letters from Freedom: Post-Cold War Realities and Perspectives*, ed. by Irena Grudzińska Gross (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 117; orig. publ. in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 9 May 1989.

analysis of the Hungarian case, the term “negotiated” characterizes best the process of political bargaining that led to a regime change in that country.²³ According to Tökés, the term “negotiated revolution” has a twofold meaning: “Is both a descriptive label and a metaphor to call attention to the political ambiguity of the outcome.”²⁴ The idea of political bargaining within the constitutional framework of the Hungarian state was also emphasized by Béla K. Király, who argued that in 1989 Hungary experienced a “lawful revolution” that occurred peacefully “within the constitutional framework of the state.”²⁵ Former dissident János Kis has proposed the term “regime change,” understood as a “peculiar type of rapid social transformation.” According to Kis, the particularity of such a social transformation resides in the fact that has elements pertaining to both revolution and reform.²⁶

²³ Tökés also stresses the Hungarian political traditions of reaching such agreements in complicated times: “Negotiation as an instrument of choice for the reconciliation of seemingly intractable differences in political beliefs and interests has well-established historic and contemporary precedents in Hungary.” Rudolf L. Tökés, *Hungary’s Negotiated Revolution: Economic Reform, Social Change, and Political Succession, 1957–1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 7–8.

²⁴ Tökés, *Hungary’s Negotiated Revolution*, 439.

²⁵ Béla K. Király, “Soft Dictatorship, Lawful Revolution, and the Socialists’ Return to Power,” in idem, ed., *Lawful Revolution in Hungary, 1989–94* (Boulder, CO: Social Science Monographs, 1995), 5. Király draws on historian István Deák’s term of “lawful revolution” employed in his masterful account of the 1848–49 revolution in Hungary. As Deák noted: “As the Hungarian liberals saw it, theirs had not been a revolution at all, but a peaceful adjustment to the times and the legal reconquest of Hungary’s historical freedoms. Their actions had been forceful, dignified, and magnanimous: his Majesty’s ancient rights had not been curtailed, only the dual sovereignty of king and nation under the Crown of Saint Stephen had now been reconstituted.” István Deák, *The Lawful Revolution: Louis Kossuth and the Hungarians 1848–1849* (London: Phoenix Press, 2001), 99; orig. publ. 1979.

²⁶ “The regime change is a peculiar type of rapid social transformation. It resembles revolution inasmuch as the legitimacy of the previous regime is broken during its course, and thus an unstable, unpredictable political situation comes about. It resembles reforms

The second phase of the 1989 revolutions was characterized by the non-negotiated, i.e. not based on the roundtable principle, but non-violent breakdown of communist rule in East Germany and Czechoslovakia, as well as by the palace coup in Bulgaria. The major feature of these non-negotiated non-violent revolutions was that political bargaining regarding the transition to a new political order occurred only after massive mobilization from below. The respective regimes, although did not open roundtable talks with the political opposition previous to the wave of mass mobilization, refrained themselves from ordering a bloodbath in order to suppress the street protests. Kitschelt et al. have put forward the term “regime change by implosion,” which can be applied to the regime changes in East Germany and Czechoslovakia: “Where implosions take place, the former elites have the least bargaining power in the transition and are shunted aside by opposition forces that quickly gain organizational and ideological predominance.”²⁷ For the particular case of East Germany, the scholarly literature has retained the term “spontaneous revolution.” As Karl-Dieter Opp observed: “The revolution in the GDR is so fascinating because it both occurred spontaneously and ensued nonviolently.... A revolution is *spontaneous* if the protests are not organized [original emphasis].”²⁸ As for the case of former Czechoslovakia, the most utilized term was that of “velvet

in that the vacuum of legitimacy is not correlated with the dispersion of power, the continuity of legality is not interrupted. What makes the situation manageable is that the political actors endeavor to set up mutually acceptable rules of the game.” See János Kis, “Between Reform and Revolution: Three Hypotheses About the Nature of the Regime Change,” in Király, ed., *Lawful Revolution in Hungary*, 53.

²⁷ See Herbert Kitschelt, Zdenka Mansfeldova, Radosław Markowski and Gábor Tóka, *Post-Communist Party Systems: Competition, Representation, and Inter-Party Cooperation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 31.

²⁸ Karl-Dieter Opp, “Some Conditions for the Emergence of Spontaneous, Nonviolent Revolutions,” in Karl-Dieter Opp, Peter Voss and Christiane Gern, *Origins of a Spontaneous Revolution: East Germany, 1989* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1995), 225.

revolution.”²⁹ With regard to the exit from “Balkan communism,” the cases of Bulgaria and Romania differed in the sense that the regime change in Bulgaria was non-violent while Romania witnessed a bloody revolution. In Bulgaria, the day after the fall of the Berlin Wall a coup was initiated from within the inner circle of power and resulted in the replacement of the supreme leader of the Bulgarian communists with a younger apparatchik. The Bulgarian palace coup was aimed at initiating a “preemptive reform” meant to ensure the survival of the communist power elite into the new political order.³⁰ However, the coup initiated the non-violent revolution: the change at the top of the communist party triggered a massive and unprecedented mass mobilization under the lead of the united opposition, which opened the way towards a real change of system in that country.

The communist regime in Romania was the last in a row to collapse during the revolutionary year 1989, and its collapse was marked by bloodshed and violence. The Romanian revolution was non-negotiated and violent and contradicted therefore the non-violent character of the rest of the 1989 revolutions in ECE. Since the opponents of the regime could not organize themselves politically under communism and thus pave the way for the systemic changes of the year 1989, there was no organized dissident group that could fill the power vacuum generated by the sudden demise of the regime. Instead, there were ultimately those who learned politics by doing it, that is, the second- and third-rank communist bureaucrats, who, in those moments of

²⁹ John F. N. Bradley, *Czechoslovakia's Velvet Revolution: A Political Analysis* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1992), 105.

³⁰ With regard to the emergence of a “preemptive reform,” Kitschelt et al. observe: “Once changes in the international situation made it uncertain whether communist rule could survive anywhere, factions of the incumbent elites had strong incentives to seize the initiative, displace the discredited top communist leadership, and engineer regime change via preemptive reform with only minimal input from the emerging democratic opposition forces.” See Kitschelt et al., *Post-Communist Party Systems*, 30.

general confusion, took over the provisional government. Although violent, Romania's exit from communism was perceived as being the least radical from among the former Soviet bloc countries because of the obvious continuity between the communist regime and the successor regime in terms of political elite recruitment. As Linz and Stepan aptly put it, Romania was "the only country where a former high Communist official was not only elected to the presidency in the first free election, but re-elected."³¹ Consequently, the Romanian revolution was characterized as "doubtful," "entangled," "diverted," "unfinished," "stolen" or "gunned down." Some pointed towards the blend of revolution and restoration that was characteristic to the Romanian situation and advanced the term "restolution."³² Others went further and stated openly that in December 1989 a coup d'état hindered the popular uprising in becoming a revolution.³³

There were also attempts at finding a term that would be able to characterize the overall exit from communism of the six countries in ECE discussed here. For instance, Leslie Holmes has coined the term "double rejective revolutions:" the first rejection was that of the external domination of the Soviet Union upon the respective countries, while the second rejection was that of communism as a system of power.³⁴ An iconoclastic definition of the revolutionary year 1989 has been put forward by Karol Soltan, who characterized it as a rebirth: "The events of 1989 were *not* a revolution (neither liberal, nor self-limiting, nor velvet, nor anti-revolutionary). They were *not* simply

³¹ See Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 344.

³² Sorin Antohi, "Higher Education and the Post-Communist generation of Students," in Henry F. Carey, ed., *Romania since 1989: Politics, Economics, and Society* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004), 335.

³³ Dorin Tudoran, *Kakistocrația* (Kakistocracy) (Chișinău: Editura Arc, 1998), 519.

³⁴ Leslie Holmes, *Post-Communism: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 14.

reforms or restoration. They *were* a rebirth, and rebirths (not revolutions, as Marxists would have it) are the locomotives of history [original emphasis].”³⁵ For his part, Soltan argues that the true meaning of the year 1989 could be found in what he perceives as an attempt of modern civilization at returning to its “symbolic origins” in the Renaissance. As he further points out: “In a modernity that re-establishes continuity with its symbolic origins in the Renaissance, the events of 1989 can be celebrated as exemplary: in them more than anywhere else we see revolution replaced by rebirth.”³⁶ When looking for a definition of 1989, one could also start from the very fact that the 1989 events in ECE took power elites and populations by surprise. True, revolutions are generally unexpected and perhaps this is why they represent a fascinating research topic. Still, in the case of the 1989 events in ECE one could also employ a term that was originally used by Paul Kecskemeti to characterize the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, and call them the “unexpected revolutions.”³⁷

The revolutions of 1989 did not initiate a “new beginning” because they did not seek for one. What was at stake was the departure from a project that aimed at solving a crisis of modernity by serving the cause of freedom and equality which proved to be an utter failure. Consequently, violence, utopian dreams and class struggle were not on the agenda of a majority of the revolutionaries of 1989 and thus one may advance the idea that the revolutions of 1989 were the first revolutions of the postmodern age. As Jürgen Kocka perceptively argued, the communist regimes, like the fascist ones, were “modern dictatorships” because the causes they served, as well as their scopes and means, were intrinsically modern: “For the communist and fascist dictatorships of

³⁵ Karol Soltan, “1989 as Rebirth,” in Antohi and Tismăneanu, eds., *Between Past and Future*, 25.

³⁶ Soltan, “1989 as Rebirth,” 37.

³⁷ Paul Kecskemeti, *The Unexpected Revolution: Social Forces in the Hungarian Uprising* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961).

the twentieth century the rule was: the modernity of their methods and goals corresponded to the modernity of their causes.”³⁸

Nonetheless, there was something new that made the 1989 revolutions in ECE – that brought down the communist dictatorships in the six countries addressed by the present work – not only different from the “classic” revolutions, but also unique. In this respect, Eisenstadt’s discussion on the “postmodern” features of 1989, seen as an upheaval against the failed project of modernity in Sovietized Europe is perhaps the most appropriate to characterize those events. In Eisenstadt’s view, one could identify similarities between 1989 and the “classic” revolutions with regard to: “The close relations among popular protests, struggles in the center, and the intellectual groups that developed; the place of principled protest; [and] the emphasis on the legitimacy of such protest, central in all of them.”³⁹ Nevertheless, the same author identifies a series of elements present in the revolutions of 1989 that could be compared with certain developments in Western societies that have been described as “postmodern.” As Roger Scruton points out: “The metanarratives of modernity ... confer legitimacy directly on the present moment, by showing how it might be seized for the benefit of all. Their legitimizing power stems from their universality – the good that is promised (freedom, enlightenment, socialism, prosperity, progress, etc.) is promised to all mankind, and the project of modernity is cosmopolitan, involving the dissolution of traditional communities and their release into the collective future.” In contradistinction, the same author further argues, the postmodern condition is characterized by the fact that: “Those metanarratives have lost their justifying force – the paths of emancipation have all been explored, the promises have been fulfilled, and we find ourselves

³⁸ See Jürgen Kocka, “The GDR: A Special Kind of Modern Dictatorship,” in Konrad H. Jarausch, ed., *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR*, transl. by Eve Duffy (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 22.

³⁹ Eisenstadt, “The Breakdown of Communist Regimes,” 100.

released from tradition, free and equal members of a world community in which every lifestyle and every value becomes openly available.”⁴⁰ With regard to the revolutions of 1989, Eisenstadt points towards some elements that might be defined as “postmodern,” such as: “The decharismatization of the centers, the weakening of the overall societywide utopian political vision and of the missionary-ideological components.” As he further states: “Even when the belief in democracy and the free market sometimes evince such elements, there is a concomitant disposition of many utopian orientations to disperse; ‘daily’ and semi-private spheres of life become central.”⁴¹ Thus, drawing on the argument put forward by Eisenstadt, it might be argued that the revolutions of 1989 were simply “postmodern” because they were non-utopian, non-violent – the Romanian exception notwithstanding, and were not carried out in the name of a particular class.⁴²

⁴⁰ See Roger Scruton, *The Palgrave Macmillan Dictionary of Political Thought*, 3rd ed. (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 541.

⁴¹ Eisenstadt, “The Breakdown of Communist Regimes,” 101.

⁴² Although grand utopian dreams were absent in 1989, “small” utopias were nevertheless present and inspired the revolutionaries of 1989. For instance, large segments of the populations living under state socialism developed an idealized image of the West and “the American way of life,” which determined in many respects the “restorative” character of the 1989 revolutions. For more on the emergence of an idealized image of the West in communist Romania see Dragoș Petrescu, “Conflicting Perceptions of (Western) Europe: The Case of Communist Romania, 1958–1989,” in José M. Faraldo, Paulina Gulińska-Jurgiel and Christian Domnitz, eds., *Europa im Ostblock: Vorstellungen und Diskurse, 1945–1991* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2008), 199–220.

Explaining the Collapse Culture, Structure, and Contingency

The changes initiated in 1989 in East-Central Europe involved not only a transition from communist authoritarian rule to a political democracy, but also a structural change from a centrally-planned economy to a functional market economy, with enormous social costs. After the communist takeovers, the newly installed regimes engaged in a process of decisive “breaking through.” As Jowitt aptly demonstrated, such a process meant the elimination of those structures, values, attitudes and behaviors that were perceived by the communist revolutionary elite as major obstacles to the fulfillment of its agenda of political, social and economic change.⁴³ The revolutions of 1989 undertook the monumental task of restoring the structures, values, attitudes and behaviors the communist regimes strove to eliminate for almost fifty years.

As shown above, drawing on Eisenstadt’s analysis, this work proposes the generic term “postmodern” revolutions when referring to the 1989 breakdown of communist rule in ECE. Nevertheless, it appears that a major theoretical challenge is to provide a working definition of such a revolution. Numerous authors have argued that violence should be considered an essential ingredient of a genuine revolution. Ironically enough, according to such a criterion, only the 1989 events in Romania could be characterized as a “true” revolution. It is this author’s opinion that what characterized the 1989 revolutions was the immediate potential for open and fatal violence, and not necessarily the actual recourse to it. Therefore, one should take into consideration two main issues when attempting at devising such a working definition. First, mass mobilization and protest should be

⁴³ Kenneth Jowitt, *Revolutionary Breakthroughs and National Development: The Case of Romania, 1944–1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 7–8.

regarded as an important precondition of this kind of revolutions. Second, the revolutionary situation in ECE in 1989 differed from the classic revolutionary situations in the sense that although an immediate potential for open and fatal violence did exist, violence was rather the exception and not the norm.

Furthermore, the following three definitions of a revolution have been considered in order to coin the definition of a revolution employed by the present work: (1) "A revolution is a rapid, fundamental, and violent domestic change in the dominant values and myths of a society, in its political institutions, social structure, leadership, and government activity and policies" (Samuel P. Huntington); (2) A revolution is: "A rapid and fundamental change of system" (Leslie Holmes); and (3) A revolution is: "The replacement of the elite and the introduction of a new political or economic order after (violent or nonviolent) protests by the population" (Karl-Dieter Opp).⁴⁴ From these, it has been devised the following working definition of a revolution which is utilized throughout the rest the present work: *A revolution is a rapid and fundamental domestic change in the dominant values and myths of a society, in its political institutions, social structure, leadership, and government activity and policies, following violent or non-violent mass protests.*

The 1989 Sequence of Collapse of State Socialism in ECE

Having reached a working definition for the 1989 revolutions, the next step is to provide a theoretical model able to explain the demise of communist regimes in six countries with different cultural-

⁴⁴ See Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 264; Leslie Holmes, *Post-Communism: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 131; and Karl-Dieter Opp, "Some Conditions for the Emergence of Spontaneous, Nonviolent Revolutions," in Opp, Voss and Gern, *Origins of a Spontaneous Revolution*, 225.

historical and socio-economic backgrounds, and characterized by distinct political cultures. This work introduces the *1989 sequence of collapse of communist dictatorships in ECE*. In other words, it considers that the communist rule in the six countries under scrutiny collapsed during the year 1989 in the following order: Poland, Hungary, German Democratic Republic, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Romania. Further explanation is nevertheless required with regard to the place occupied by Bulgaria within the 1989 sequence of collapse. One might ask why Bulgaria is placed after Czechoslovakia in the aforementioned sequence of collapse since, on 10 November 1989, the Secretary General of the Bulgarian Communist Party, Todor Zhivkov, was forced to resign and was replaced by the sitting Minister of Foreign Affairs, Petar Mladenov. This author acknowledges that a majority of the Bulgarians perceive 10 November as the date of the regime change in their country. At the same time, the present analysis considers that the political transformations in Bulgaria gained momentum from early December 1989 onwards, especially after the creation of the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) on 7 December. The UDF, which came into being as an alliance of some thirteen opposition groups and emerging political parties and whose leader became the former dissident philosopher Zhelyu Zhelev, played a major role in mobilizing public support and organizing demonstrations against the communist party in power, and contributed significantly to the revoking of communist party's power monopoly.⁴⁵

When addressing the revolutionary year 1989 in ECE, one is compelled to answer two basic questions: (1) Why the communist

⁴⁵ For more on the UDF see Duncan M. Perry, "From Opposition to Government: Bulgaria's 'Union of Democratic Forces' and its Antecedents," in Wolfgang Höpken, ed., *Revolution auf Raten: Bulgariens Weg zur Demokratie* (Munich: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 1996), 34. See also R. J. Crampton, *A Concise History of Bulgaria*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 212–13; and Ivan Ilchev, *The Rose of the Balkans: A Short History of Bulgaria*, transl. from Bulgarian by Bistra Roushkova (Sofia: Colibri, 1995), 402–403.

rule in the six countries mentioned above ended precisely in 1989; and (2) Why the demise of those communist regimes occurred in the aforementioned particular sequence. Although there is by no means easy to provide a convincing answer to these simple questions, one can start from a general explanatory model applicable to all societies in ECE that went through simultaneous processes of modernization from above and nation-building in their quest for catching-up with the West. It is this author's opinion that such an explanatory model has to take into account three key factors, i.e. *path-dependency*, *agency* and *contingency* and concentrate on the processes of state- and nation-building in ECE over the last two hundred years.

Turning back to the revolutions of 1989, it may be argued that one can devise an explanatory model by establishing correlations between a series of factors that could be structured on three main categories, as follows: (1) structure; (2) culture; and (3) contingency. A comprehensive analysis of the 1989 phenomenon in ECE has to address therefore issues related to historical legacies, levels of economic development and social structures, as well as cultural and political traditions. Moreover, one should also address the issue of political cultures, which would entail a discussion on: subjective approaches to "national" histories; competing visions of modernity; trust or distrust of government and politics; religious faith and treatment of minorities. Although a single model, the Stalinist one, was imposed almost simultaneously on the six countries under scrutiny in the aftermath of World War II, the model imposed from "abroad and above" was gradually transformed in the countries discussed in this book and gave birth to national-communisms that eventually collapsed following various patterns ranging from negotiated to bloody revolutions. In other words, the Stalinist dictatorships established in ECE evolved into different kinds of dictatorships and thus a major question arises: How many types of communist dictatorships can one discern among the six ones that collapsed in 1989?

To paraphrase Garton Ash, the six communist dictatorships that collapsed throughout the year 1989 need qualifying as much as the revolutions that brought them down. Since variations among the Soviet bloc countries did exist, one has to specify what kind of “modern dictatorships” were the communist dictatorships in the six countries under discussion. It is this author’s opinion that the 1989 sequence of collapse, i.e. Poland – Hungary – East Germany – Czechoslovakia – Bulgaria – Romania, consisted in fact of the demise of three types of communist dictatorships: (1) “national-accommodative” (Poland and Hungary); “welfare” (East Germany and Czechoslovakia); and (3) modernizing-nationalizing (Bulgaria and Romania). The term “national-accommodative” communist dictatorship employed by this author for Poland and Hungary has been coined by Herbert Kitschelt, Zdenka Mansfeldova, Radosław Markowski and Gábor Tóka who have distinguished between “bureaucratic-authoritarian,” “national-accommodative” and “patrimonial” communist regimes.⁴⁶ One can easily observe that the initiation of the 1989 sequence of collapse originated in the camp of “national-accommodative” communist dictatorships, where the 1989 revolutions took the form of “negotiated revolutions” based on the roundtable principle. To characterize the communist dictatorships in East Germany and Czechoslovakia – although the term applies more to the Czech lands than to Slovakia, this author follows Konrad H. Jarausch who has coined the concept of “welfare dictatorship.” As Jarausch has aptly shown in his analysis of former GDR, such

⁴⁶ According to Kitschelt et al., the communist regimes in ECE can be defined as follows: (1) bureaucratic-authoritarian communism – East Germany and Czech Republic; (2) mix of bureaucratic-authoritarian and national-accommodative communism – Poland; (3) national-accommodative communism – Hungary; (4) mix of national-accommodative and patrimonial communism – Slovakia; and (5) patrimonial communism – Bulgaria and Romania. See Table 1.2. – Communist rule, mode of transition, and post-communist regime form, in Kitschelt et al., *Post-Communist Party Systems*, 39.

regimes were characterized by a fundamental contradiction between “care and coercion.”⁴⁷ The demise of the “welfare dictatorships” in East Germany and Czechoslovakia occurred through non-negotiated non-violent revolutions, and was influenced by the “negotiated revolutions” in neighboring Poland and Hungary. As far as Romania and Bulgaria are concerned, it is this author’s opinion that the communist dictatorships established in those countries can be termed as *modernizing-nationalizing dictatorships*. The emphasis on the “dynamic political stance” in this respect is crucial: the communist regimes in both countries perceived their party-states in the making as not completely modern *and* national, and therefore devised policies aimed at spurring industrial development and creating ethnically homogenous “socialist” nations.⁴⁸ Having defined the 1989 sequence of collapse of state socialism in ECE, let us turn now towards presenting a theoretical model aimed at providing a causal explanation for the inception, unfolding and outcome of the 1989 revolutions in ECE, which will be applied consistently for explaining the 1989 revolution in Romania.

⁴⁷ See Jarausch, “Care and Coercion: The GDR as Welfare Dictatorship,” in idem, ed., *Dictatorship as Experience*, 59–60.

⁴⁸ The establishment of a modernizing-nationalizing dictatorship presupposes that the respective communist regime is characterized by a “nationalizing nationalism,” apart from its propensity towards “socialist” modernization. In such situations, the party-state in the making perceives itself as “unrealized” in national terms, which in turn imposes the adoption of a “dynamic political stance:” the communist state is not yet national in its entirety and therefore it is imperative to be “nationalizing.” As Rogers Brubaker puts it: “Nationalizing nationalisms involve claims made in the name of a ‘core nation’ or nationality, defined in ethnocultural terms.... The core nation is understood as the legitimate ‘owner’ of the state, which is conceived as the state *of* and *for* the core nation [original emphasis].” See Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 5, 63.

The Key Factors: Structural, Conjunctural and Nation-Specific

In order to explain the collapse of Romanian communism, the present work employs a model-building approach based on the three categories mentioned above, i.e. *structure*, *culture* and *contingency*. The main assumption that stays at the basis of the model presented below is that the 1989 revolutions were determined by a complicated and, sometimes, perplexing aggregation of *structural*, *nation-specific* and *conjunctural* factors. To be sure, these factors operated and interacted in various ways in each of the countries analyzed, but they were nevertheless present in each case. Such a model is able to accommodate issues of path-dependency, patterns of compliance and contestation under communist rule and questions of interdependence at both international and Soviet Bloc level. The particular way in which the above-mentioned factors aggregated determined eventually the nature of the revolution in each of the cases discussed, i.e. negotiated or non-negotiated, peaceful or violent, as well as the order in which the six communist dictatorships were overthrown. Such an analysis concentrating on the three groups of factors mentioned above has been inspired by Ole Nørgaard and Steven L. Sampson who, in their 1984 study “Poland’s Crisis and East European Socialism,” have explained the birth of the Polish Solidarity as an outcome of social and cultural factors.⁴⁹ Let us examine the way Nørgaard and Sampson have defined the three categories of factors, i.e. “structural,” “conjunctural” and “specific” in their pioneering work.

⁴⁹ See Ole Nørgaard and Steven L. Sampson, “Poland’s Crisis and East European Socialism,” in *Theory and Society*, Vol. 13, No. 6 (November 1984), 773–801. For a critical analysis of the model proposed by Nørgaard and Sampson see Michael D. Kennedy, *Professionals, Power and Solidarity in Poland: A Critical Sociology of Soviet-Type Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 60–62.

Structural factors refer to “the relations between society’s economic and political organization on the one hand, and the expectations and demands of key social groups on the other. *Structural factors are relevant to all the socialist countries* [emphasis added].” As for the conjunctural factors, their examination aims at explaining: “Why the structural crisis appears at a certain point in time.” Furthermore, as the two authors point out, “conjunctural factors are neither intrinsically socialist nor particularly Polish in origin.” Finally, Nørgaard and Sampson introduce the nation-specific factors, whose role is “to explain why contradictions are expressed differently from one country to another.” As the aforementioned authors note: “These *nation-specific factors* (not to be confused with nationalism) determine the precise nature of the social response to the structural and conjunctural factors [original emphasis].”⁵⁰ The following section discusses the factors whose aggregation determined the nature of the 1989 events in the six countries in ECE.

Structural factors were common to all societies in which “state socialism” came into being by the imposition of the Soviet model from “above and abroad,” and whose exit from communism occurred during the same year 1989. In the terms of the present analysis, two structural factors are of prime importance: (1.1) economic failure; and (1.2) ideological decay. *Economic failure* refers primarily to the perceived failure of state socialism to offer a living standard similar to that of the more advanced Western, capitalistic societies, and not necessarily to the absolute failure of those regimes to achieve a certain level of economic development. Nevertheless, in the countries of “actually existing socialism” economic performance was an essential source of legitimacy for the regime. At the same time, the economies of the Sovietized countries in ECE were transformed in accordance with the Stalinist model of “command economy,” which meant that the party-state in the making was both proprietor and conductor of

⁵⁰ See Nørgaard and Sampson, “Poland’s Crisis,” 773–74.

the economy.⁵¹ The slogan “Heavy industry at all costs” epitomized the developmental pattern imposed by the communist parties in power through central planning.⁵² However, the resources available did not permit a simultaneous accelerated growth of primary and secondary sectors. Since the decision regarding which sectors were to be further developed was primarily political, the central planners favored, especially until the death of Stalin in 1953, the “producer goods” sector. Therefore, the “consumer goods” sector was consistently neglected throughout the entire period of communist rule in favor of heavy industry. Thus, the policy of sustained investments in heavy industry resulted in increasing shortages of consumer goods that affected directly the population.⁵³ As the Polish economist Jan Rutkowski put it: “The economic potential increases, but this does not result in the expansion of individual consumption. This systemic pressure to increase socially unproductive capital assets hits only one limit – the limit of social resistance.”⁵⁴ Thus, the

⁵¹ According to Lewin, a “command economy” is characterized by the following elements: “(1) a high degree of centralization of economic decision making and planning; (2) comprehensive character of planning; (3) preference for physical units as instruments in accounting; (4) the use of ‘material balances’ for obtaining internal consistency of the plans; (5) a centralized administration for material supplies, which operated as a rationing system; (6) the imperative and detailed character of plans; (7) a hierarchically organized administration within factories; (8) the relegation of market categories and mechanisms to a secondary role, mainly to the sphere, albeit important, of personal consumption and to labor; and (9) coercion by the state, as direct organizer of the economy with its ubiquitous controls and estatization not only of the economy but of the other spheres of life as well.” See Moshe Lewin, *Political Undercurrents in Soviet Economic Debates: From Bukharin to the Modern Reformers* (London: Pluto Press, 1975), 113–14.

⁵² See Derek H. Aldcroft and Steven Morewood, *Economic Change in Eastern Europe since 1918* (Aldershot, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 1995), 110.

⁵³ George Kolankiewicz and Paul G. Lewis, *Poland: Politics, Economics and Society* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1988), 102.

⁵⁴ Cited in Bartłomiej Kamiński, *The Collapse of State Socialism: The Case of Poland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 127.

constant deprivations to which consumers throughout ECE were subjected to – though to different degrees, depending on the epoch and country, contributed to the final demise of the communist regimes in ECE. As Aldcroft and Morewood have observed: “The consumer was asked to endure innumerable deprivations which would have been intolerable in the West and which ultimately sparked revolution in Eastern Europe.”⁵⁵

Nevertheless, the way economic failure was perceived by the populations living in each of the six countries discussed deserves further examination. For instance, in the case of Romania, and to some extent in that of Poland, the economic situation led to increasing dissatisfaction with the regime by significant strata of the population. Communist Romania represents perhaps the most telling example of the economic failure of state socialism. A timid attempt to reform the command economy in that country was made in the late 1960s. Its main proponent, however, did not succeed in face of the supporters of a centrally planned economy of which the most prominent was the supreme leader of the party himself, and was marginalized beginning in 1968. Although the first signs of a deep economic crisis appeared in the mid-1970s, the party took the political decision to pursue the pattern of extensive development of steel and heavy industries. In the early 1980s, another political decision put a considerable strain on the already declining economy of the country: Ceaușescu decided to pay back Romania’s external debt, which in late 1981 rose to over \$ 10 billion. In order to achieve this goal, the regime took the measure of drastically reduce imports. As a consequence, beginning with 1981–1982 Romania entered a period of chronic shortages of foodstuffs and other basic things such soap, toothpaste and detergents. Thus, during the 1980s, that country witnessed a decline in the standard of living “unmatched since the famine of the postwar period,” as an informed observer of Romanian

⁵⁵ Aldcroft and Morewood, *Economic Change in Eastern Europe*, 106.

affairs put it.⁵⁶ As a consequence of regime's mistaken economic policies, in 1989 the situation in Romania was significantly different from that in the rest of the Sovietized Europe, with the possible exception of Albania: due to the miseries of everyday life, the potential for protest of a majority of the population was appreciable.

In the Polish case, the relationship between economic performance and the outbreak of social protest has been addressed by numerous authors. As Bartłomiej Kamiński has aptly shown, the Polish communist economy went through four major "investment cycles," as follows: (1) 1949–1957; (2) 1958–1971; (3) 1972–1982; and (4) 1983–1988.⁵⁷ Each of these cycles ended up with a deep political crisis. The first three cycles concluded with the crises of 1956, 1970 and 1981, which were in turn followed by a "normalization" period that ensured the survival of the regime. All these crises led to a change at the top of the hierarchy of the PUWP. The fourth cycle, 1983–1988, ended up with a crisis that brought down the communist regime in Poland and initiated the 1989 "snowball effect," that is, the chain reaction that led to the demise of communist regimes throughout ECE.

In other cases, such as that of communist Hungary, where the attempts at reforming the command economy bore some fruit during the 1970s, it was rather the relative dissatisfaction felt by major segments of the population that undermined the regime. In the late 1960s, Hungarian communists engaged in a systemic change of the command economy and thus in 1968 the Kádár regime introduced a set of economic reforms, known as the New Economic Mechanism (NEM). Economist János Kornai argues that the Hungarian reform, which consisted in the "radical abolition of short-term mandatory planning," proved its viability in spite of a partially developed market

⁵⁶ Michael Shafir, *Romania – Politics, Economics and Society: Political Stagnation and Simulated Change* (London: Frances Pinter Publishers, 1985), 117.

⁵⁷ Kamiński, *The Collapse of State Socialism*, 120–21.

mechanism.⁵⁸ Although some analyses have showed that the NEM failed in terms of macroeconomic results, it succeeded in initiating a timid institutional devolution of the regime and developing an enterprise culture. People engaged in supplementary working hours in the second economy, in addition to the job they had in the first economy, in order to increase their income.⁵⁹ Towards the late 1980s, the performance of the economy started to diminish. If one applies the theory of short-term setbacks to the Hungarian case, the situation in the late 1980s can be explained as follows: after the “golden period” of high consumption and rising expectations, the period of relative economic stagnation during the 1980s led to a rise of societal dissatisfaction with the regime.

In terms of absolute or relative dissatisfaction with the economic performance of the command economies in ECE, one should be reminded the words of sociologist Daniel Chirot: “No East European country, not even Romania, was an Ethiopia or a Burma, with famine and a reversion to primitive, local subsistence economies.”⁶⁰ As Chirot pointed out, Romania and to some extent Poland were experiencing economic difficulties, but they were still far from being in a situation that would allow a comparison with the troubled countries of the so-called Third World. In this respect, Chirot further argues: “Other economies – in Hungary, but even more so in Czechoslovakia and East Germany – were failures only by the standards of the most advanced capitalist economies. *On a world scale these were rich, well-developed economies, not poor ones* [emphasis added].”⁶¹ Thus, one

⁵⁸ János Kornai, *Evolution of the Hungarian Economy, 1848–1998*; Volume II: *Paying the Bill for Goulash-Communism* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 2000), 19.

⁵⁹ Kornai, *Paying the Bill for Goulash-Communism*, 41–42.

⁶⁰ Daniel Chirot, “What Happened in Eastern Europe in 1989?” in idem, ed., *The Crisis of Leninism and the Decline of the Left: The Revolutions of 1989* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991), 4.

⁶¹ Chirot, “What Happened in Eastern Europe in 1989?” 4.

should stress once again that in terms of economic development, the difference between the developed countries of the First World and the developing communist countries of the Second World, although appreciable, proved to be surmountable in the aftermath of 1989 as compared to the wide gap that separated the Second World from the underdeveloped countries of the Third World.

Furthermore, since the present work is concerned with the 1989 collapse of communist rule in ECE, the problem of real or perceived economic failure in each of the six cases under scrutiny is discussed in the context of the strategies put forward by those regimes in order to achieve economic legitimacy. Being imposed from without and thus having a fundamental legitimacy deficit, the issue of increasing prosperity and raising the living standards of the population as a means of achieving legitimacy became central for the power elites in Sovietized ECE. Thus, the analysis of the economic factors that contributed to the 1989 demise of the communist regimes examined concentrates on the economic policies adopted by those regimes and their efforts aimed at reconciling their political goals with the social and economic realities. Consequently, issues such as planning mechanisms, organization of production and labor, formation of prices, financial control, and the like are not the main focus of this work.⁶²

Ideological decay or the overall erosion of the revolutionary ideology refers to the fading away of the utopian goal of building a radically new, classless society.⁶³ As far as the present analysis is

⁶² In this respect, sophisticated and comprehensive economic analyses of the economics of “actually existing socialism” have been provided by brilliant economists from ECE such as Brus or Kornai. See, for instance, Włodzimierz Brus, *Histoire économique de l'Europe de l'Est, 1945–1985* (Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 1986) orig. publ. 1981; and János Kornai, *The Socialist System: The Political Economy of Communism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

⁶³ This aspect has been also referred to as “disintegration of ideology.” See, András Bozóki, “Introduction” to idem, ed., *The Roundtable Talks of 1989: The Genesis of Hungarian Democracy* (Budapest: Central European University Press, Budapest, 2002), xix.

concerned, this is common for the six countries under discussion, where state socialism was fully institutionalized only through a “second revolution” or a “revolution from above.” The “revolutionary struggle” of the local communists did not encompass either a “first revolution” on the model of the Bolshevik Revolution, or a mixture of revolution and independence war on the model of Tito’s partisan war in Yugoslavia. Consequently, the communists in the six countries under scrutiny were confined to carry out solely a “revolution from above,” which represented the major guiding principle for the relationship between the communist parties in power and the respective societies in the aftermath of the communist takeovers. The concept of “revolution from above” is understood in the terms of Robert C. Tucker’s analysis of the “second” Soviet revolution of 1928–1941. As Tucker puts it: “The revolution from above was a state-initiated, state-directed, and state-enforced process State power was the driving force of economic, political, social, and cultural change that was revolutionary in rapidity of accomplishment, forcible methods, and transformative effect.”⁶⁴ A series of events that followed Nikita Khrushchev’s “secret speech” in the front of the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU, most prominently the Hungarian revolution of October–November 1956 indicated that ideology undeniably lost its strength in Sovietized Europe.

Simply put, ideological decay describes, to use Andrzej Walicki’s inspired term, the post-1956 situation in which communism gradually ceased to represent a “unifying Final Goal.”⁶⁵ Thus, it may be argued that ideology ceased to be a driving force in regime’s relationship with the Hungarian society in the aftermath of the 1956 revolution. The same happened in former Czechoslovakia after the

⁶⁴ Robert C. Tucker, “Preface” to idem, *Stalin in Power: The Revolution from Above, 1928–1941* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co, 1990), xiv–xv.

⁶⁵ Andrzej Walicki, *Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom: The Rise and Fall of the Communist Utopia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 517.

suppression of the Prague Spring by the August 1968 Soviet-led invasion of the country by the Warsaw Treaty Organization troops. In other cases, anti-fascism or nationalism acted for a while in support of the respective regimes and thus alleviated the undermining effects of ideological decay. For instance, in the case of East Germany, anti-fascism provided a sort of ideological support for the regime. However, after the suppression of the June 1953 revolt it became quite clear that the bulk of the population did not pay much attention to the GDR propaganda machine that demonized the allegedly “imperialistic” Federal Republic of Germany. On the contrary, the increased migration to West Germany over the period 1953–1961 forced the regime in East Germany to erect the Berlin Wall in August 1961, which underlined the “moral, political, and economic” failure of state socialism in that country.⁶⁶ In the case of Romania, ideological decay was alleviated to some extent by the communist elite’s post-1956 return to traditional values and gradual instrumentalization of nationalism. After 1968, under the rule of Nicolae Ceaușescu, the communist regime in Romania engaged in a sustained policy of assimilating the ethnic minorities, of whom the first target was the Hungarian one. An outburst of ethnic nationalism also occurred in neighboring Bulgaria, where the communist regime under Todor Zhivkov took the decision to accelerate the forced assimilation of the ethnic Turks – a policy that is known as the “revival” or the “regenerative” process – in order to mitigate the popular discontent with regime’s economic performance.⁶⁷

Conjunctural factors. Contingency also played a role in the unfolding of the 1989 events in ECE. Consequently, the present analysis stresses the role of conjunctural factors in the inception and unfolding of the revolutions of 1989. Conjunctural factors are of two

⁶⁶ Stefan Wolle, *DDR* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer Verlag, 2004), 46.

⁶⁷ Crampton, *A Concise History of Bulgaria*, 204–205.

kinds: (1) internal; and (2) external.⁶⁸ With regard to the 1989 collapse of communist rule in ECE, one can mention the following internal conjunctural factors: natural catastrophes (earthquakes, floods, drought or unusually mild weather), coming of age of a new generation, etc. Although the internal conjunctural factors contributed to a lesser extent to the final demise of the regime, they should not be neglected. For instance, in the case of the bloody demise of Romanian communist regime, a major internal conjunctural factor was the coming of age of the 1967–1969 baby boom resulted from the policy of forced natality launched by Ceaușescu after his coming to power in 1965. Furthermore, as many participants to the 1989 events in Timișoara and Bucharest pointed out, the exceptionally mild weather for the month of December also played a role in the way the 1989 events unfolded in Romania.

As for the external conjuncture, it may be argued that it has a direct impact on the breakdown of all the six communist regimes in ECE. International media, Radio Free Europe most prominently, contributed heavily to the initiation of the chain reaction throughout ECE. By broadcasting continuously the news about the initiation of the 1989 changes in Poland, these radio stations prepared the opposition groups and the populations in neighboring countries for a possible similar change. Apart from the prominent role played by the international media, three other external conjunctural factors have been often invoked in relation with the 1989 revolutions: the

⁶⁸ In structuring the conjunctural factors on two categories, internal and external, this author draws on the analysis of the four conjunctural factors identified to have contributed to the emergence of the Polish crisis of 1980–81, put forward by Nørgaard and Sampson: (1) “the world economic crisis and its effect on Eastern Europe;” (2) “the degree to which economic dependence on the West was linked to internal regime legitimacy;” (3) “the demographic shifts that created certain unresolvable social strains in Polish society;” and (4) “the effect of natural calamities, poor harvests, and food shortages in creating popular dissatisfaction”. See Nørgaard and Sampson, “Poland’s Crisis,” 780.

Vatican, Reagan, and Gorbachev factors. For instance, the 1978 election of a Polish Pope had a direct influence on the development of dissident stances in Poland in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s. This factor has to be considered especially when discussing the initiation of the 1989 revolutions in Poland. Similarly, one has to consider the project of the American President Ronald Reagan (1981–1989) of establishing a high-tech spatial weapon system that weakened the Soviet Union both economically and militarily, and thus influenced the Soviet politics in ECE. Last, but by no means least, one cannot explain the chain reaction that took place in 1989 in ECE without taking interdependence into consideration and thus focusing on the “snowball effect.” It is, however, this author’s opinion that of all these factors, the Gorbachev factor and the “snowball effect” deserve further discussion.

The coming to power of Mikhail S. Gorbachev, who became secretary general of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in March 1985 and the launch of his domestic *perestroika* were events that had an immense impact on the communist regimes of Eastern Europe. Looking for the causes of the breakdown of communist rule in ECE, Leszek Kołakowski observed: “Among the many factors, the personal contribution of Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev cannot be omitted, though it is evident that he both shaped events and was shaped by them.”⁶⁹ Nevertheless, Gorbachev’s insistence on the need for “renewal” and “new thinking” revealed the crisis of the Soviet system. As Kołakowski further points out: “Still, by repeatedly insisting that fundamental though ill-defined changes were urgently needed, he revealed the empire’s lack of self-confidence.”⁷⁰ Moreover, it was the Soviet policy of non-intervention during the “miraculous year 1989” that eased the way towards peaceful, “negotiated”

⁶⁹ See Leszek Kołakowski, “Amidst Moving Ruins,” in Tismăneanu, ed., *The Revolutions of 1989*, 56; orig. publ. 1992.

⁷⁰ Kołakowski, “Amidst Moving Ruins,” 56.

revolutions in ECE, with the notable exception of Romania. As Archie Brown aptly puts it: "The key to change in Eastern Europe was Gorbachev's decision in principle to abandon Soviet foreign military interventions and his refusal to contemplate resort to them, even when the Soviet Union was faced with an utterly changed relationship with the area it had controlled since the end of the Second World War."⁷¹ In a similar vein, Andrew C. Janos has questioned the analyses that qualified the 1989 events as revolutions and argued that the international context was the determining factor in the unfolding of events: "In reality, however, the locus of change was in the international sphere, where the Soviet empire had relinquished its erstwhile holdings in order to effect a deal with its global adversaries."⁷²

One should be reminded that after 1968 the relations between the USSR and the Sovietized countries of ECE stayed under the sign of the Brezhnev Doctrine, which asserted that the USSR had the right to intervene in any country in which the communist government was threatened. After Gorbachev's coming to power, things changed fundamentally but the leaders of the Sovietized countries in ECE seemed not to understand that. At least, this was the impression of Aleksandr Yakovlev, who confessed in a book-length interview with Lilly Marcou: "The former leaders of the East European countries did not take seriously, did not want to believe what Mikhail Sergeyevich kept telling them: 'From now on, the political choice in these countries belongs to their peoples, everything is going to be done in accordance with their options.'"⁷³ Thus, under

⁷¹ Archie Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 249.

⁷² Andrew C. Janos, *East Central Europe in the Modern World: The Politics of the Borderlands from Pre- to Postcommunism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 343.

⁷³ Alexandre Yakovlev, *Ce que nous voulons faire de l'Union Soviétique: Entretien avec Lilly Marcou* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1991). The passage quoted is from

Gorbachev, the Sinatra Doctrine replaced the Brezhnev Doctrine and this was made clear by the Soviet Foreign Ministry spokesman, Gennady Gerasimov, on 25 October 1989. Gerasimov defined the so-called Sinatra Doctrine by stating that every country must decide for itself the path to be pursued and referring to Frank Sinatra's song "I did it my way."⁷⁴

The collapse of the communist regimes in ECE cannot be discussed apart from the events in neighboring countries. The "snowball effect," namely the unfolding of events during the year 1989, had a decisive role in creating a special state of mind throughout the region, at both the level of the communist ruling elites and the level of the populations. It was, obviously, a regime that did not collapse because of the snowball effect, and this was that of communist Poland. In the particular case of Poland, it may be argued that the election of a Polish Pope in 1978 was a major conjunctural factor that contributed in the long run to the collapse of communism. The Polish Roundtable Agreements, concluded on 5 April 1989 initiated the "snowball effect" which lasted until 22 December 1989 when the Romanian communism was brought down by a violent revolution. For reasons that are explained below, it was Hungary that followed suit. The "negotiated revolution" in Hungary was influenced by the Polish Roundtable Talks. As András Bozóki puts it: "The political use of the phrase 'Roundtable' entered the vocabulary of the Hungarian opposition after the Polish Roundtable talks."⁷⁵ The Hungarian democratic opposition successfully applied the Polish model of Roundtable talks to their country and thus completed the

the Romanian version, Alexandr Iakovlev, *Ce vrem să facem din Uniunea Sovietică: Convorbire cu Lilly Marcou*, transl. from French by Sanda Grigoriu (What we intend to do of the Soviet Union: A conversation with Lilly Marcou) (Bucharest: Editura Humanitas, 1991), 114.

⁷⁴ Timothy Garton Ash, *In Europe's Name: Germany and the Divided Continent* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 4.

⁷⁵ Bozóki, "Introduction" to idem, ed., *The Roundtable Talks of 1989*, xvii.

first phase – the “peaceful,” “negotiated” or, pace Garton Ash, the “refolutionary” one – of the 1989 revolutions. In the Romanian case, witness accounts from the period show that the breakdown of communist regimes, from Poland and Hungary to the neighboring Bulgaria, created a special state of mind among Romania’s population. Furthermore, the true meaning of the 1989 events in ECE could not escape to those who served the regime, first and foremost to the secret police agencies. It was also due to the “snowball effect” that a large number of the secret police commanders and party activists remained mostly passive during the revolutionary events of 1989.

Nation-specific factors. As shown above, the 1989 revolutions were non-violent (the Romanian exception notwithstanding), non-ideological and were not carried out in the name of a particular class. However, the particular aspects related to the inception, unfolding and outcome of those events need further explanation. For instance: Why it was exactly in Poland that the 1989 chain reaction was initiated? Why only Hungary emulated the Polish model of a “negotiated revolution”? Why it was only in Romania that the communist regime went down violently? In order to answer such questions one should identify a set of nation-specific factors that would enable us ascertain the intricate relationships between regime and society in ECE, focusing on patterns of compliance or conflict with authority. Thus, the present analysis considers that the 1989 sequence of collapse came into being due to the particular way in which regime and society reacted, in each of the six countries under scrutiny, to the structural and conjunctural factors discussed above. Therefore, the place each of the six countries eventually occupied in this sequence was determined by the particular ways in which power elites and social actors responded to economic failure and ideological decay and to the external or internal conjuncture. The solutions for solving the crisis of state socialism conceived by power elites and social actors in each particular context also determined the occurrence of a negotiated, non-negotiated, or violent revolution.

This quest for specific patterns of interaction between regime and society brings us to the study of cultural values, attitudinal patterns and behavioral propensities. It may be argued that culture provides a framework through which incumbents – political leaders or power elites – tend to understand the claims and actions of their opponents and react to them, and vice versa. Thus, as Marc Howard Ross puts it: “Culture offers significant resources that leaders and groups use as instruments of organization and mobilization.”⁷⁶ Furthermore, when attempting at providing a causal explanation for the particular sequence in which the 1989 revolutions unfolded, one should be also reminded of the concept of “repertoires of collective action.” The concept was coined by Tilly, who defines them as: “A limited set of routines that are learned, shared, and acted out through a relatively deliberate process of choices. *Repertoires are learned cultural creations* [emphasis added].”⁷⁷

Therefore, the present work employs the concept of *political culture* in order to analyze the specific relationships between political structures and cultures, as well as the particular patterns of interaction between regime and society. The purpose of such an analysis is to explain the nature of change, i.e., violent or non-violent, as well as the reason why each country occupied its particular place in the aforementioned sequence of collapse, i.e., Poland-Hungary-East Germany-Czechoslovakia-Bulgaria-Romania. In their 1963 classic work, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*, Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba define the concept as follows: “The term ‘political culture’ thus refers to the specifically political orientations – attitudes towards the political system and its

⁷⁶ See Marc Howard Ross, “Culture and Identity in Comparative Political Analysis,” in Mark Irving Lichbach and Alan S. Zuckerman, *Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture, and Structure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 52, 60.

⁷⁷ Quoted in Ross, “Culture and Identity in Comparative Political Analysis,” 52.

various parts, and attitudes toward the role of the self in the system... . It is a set of orientations toward a special set of social objects and processes.”⁷⁸ Subsequent definitions did not depart much from the initial understanding of the concept. For instance, Almond and Bingham Powell Jr. proposed a brief definition that reads as follows: “A political culture is a particular distribution of political attitudes, values, feelings, information and skills. As people’s attitudes affect what they will do, a nation’s political culture affects the conduct of its citizens and leaders throughout the political system.”⁷⁹ Verba provided an insightful definition of political culture by stating that it explains how “people respond to what they perceive of politics and how they interpret what they see.”⁸⁰ For Larry Diamond, political culture is: “A people’s dominant beliefs, attitudes, values, sentiments, and evaluation about the political system of its country, and the role of the self in that system,”⁸¹ while Ben Rosamond defines it as: “The set of values, beliefs and attitudes within which a political system operates.”⁸²

A further discussion is nevertheless necessary with regard to the concept of political culture and its uses in the particular case of communist studies. Numerous authors have emphasized the importance of political culture theory for explaining the intricate relationship between attitudes and behaviour under communist rule. In this respect, Archie Brown aptly pointed out: “The peculiar relevance of the study of ‘political culture’ in relation to change and

⁷⁸ Gabriel A. Almond and Sydney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1989), 12.

⁷⁹ Gabriel A. Almond and G. Bingham Powell Jr., *Comparative Politics Today: A World-View* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 39.

⁸⁰ Sidney Verba, “Comparative Political Culture,” in Louis J. Cantori, ed., *Comparative Political Systems* (Boston: Holbrook Press, 1974), 227.

⁸¹ Quoted in Jeffrey Haynes, *Comparative Politics in a Globalizing World* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 181.

⁸² Quoted in Haynes, *Comparative Politics in a Globalizing World*, 181.

continuity in Communist states lies in the fact that the goals of total political, economic and cultural transformation have been pursued by ruling Communist Parties in societies with the most diverse historical and cultural traditions.”⁸³ In a similar vein, Almond observed that communist rule might be considered a “natural experiment” in attitude change and argued in favour of employing political culture theory for the analysis of communist regimes in order to test its explanatory power:

The argument would be that however powerful the effort, however repressive the structure, however monopolistic and persuasive the media, however tempting the incentive system, political culture would impose significant constraints on effective behavioral and structural change because underlying attitudes would tend to persist to a significant degree and for a significant period of time.⁸⁴

Archie Brown’s scholarship on political cultures in communist regimes deserves a particular attention. According to Brown, political culture is: “The subjective perception of history and politics, the fundamental beliefs and values, the foci of identification and loyalty, and the political knowledge and expectations which are the product of the specific historical experience of nations and groups.”⁸⁵ At the same time, Brown insists on making an analytical distinction between political culture and political behavior. Thus, he argues in favor of focusing solely on subjective orientations to the political process and

⁸³ See Archie Brown, “Introduction” to Archie Brown and Jack Gray, eds., *Political Culture and Political Change in Communist States* (London: Macmillan, 1977), 1.

⁸⁴ Gabriel A. Almond, “Communism and Political Culture Theory,” in idem, *A Discipline Divided: Schools and Sects in Political Science* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1990), 158.

⁸⁵ Brown also put forward an analytical framework for the study of communist political cultures based on the following main themes: (1) previous political experience; (2) values and fundamental political beliefs; (3) foci of identification and loyalty; and (4) political knowledge and expectations. See Brown, “Introduction,” 16–18.

excluding patterns of political behavior from the political culture approach when one engages in the study of communist regimes in general.⁸⁶

The present work, however, is concerned with both beliefs and actions. As Jowitt perceptively observed, numerous analyses of communist regimes “tended to discount or neglect the role of culture, largely because the relationship between regime and society was viewed simply as a pattern of domination-subordination.”⁸⁷ The same author insists on the necessity to analyze “the visible and systematic impact society has on the character, quality, and style of political life” in order to explain the nature of communist political structures and cultures. According to Jowitt, political culture is: “The set of informal, adaptative postures – *behavioral and attitudinal* – that emerge in response to, and interact with, the set of formal definitions – ideological, policy and institutional – that characterize a given level of society [emphasis added].” By focusing on both attitudes and behavior, as Jowitt suggests, the present work discusses the patterns of conduct of power elites and social actors throughout the communist period, thus acknowledging that, in their quest for creating radically new polities on the Soviet model, the party-states in ECE engaged in a conscious and sustained effort of imposing from above new political values. The process of political socialization under the communist regimes displayed two contrasting facets. New, official and “sound,” values were inculcated during adolescence and adulthood through schooling and socialization within official organizations, as well as by the centrally controlled mass media. At the same time, old, traditional values proved to be more resilient than previously thought and were handed down to younger generations

⁸⁶ Brown, “Introduction,” 9.

⁸⁷ Kenneth Jowitt, *New World Disorder: The Leninist Extinction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 51.

within the family environment and contributed to the development of oppositional stances towards the regime.

In order to analyze the process described above, this work draws on the three types of political culture defined by Jowitt: elite, regime and community political culture. “Elite political culture” is defined as: “A set of informal adaptative (behavioral and attitudinal) postures that emerge as response to and consequence of a given elite’s identity-forming experiences.” “Regime political culture” is understood as: “A set of informal adaptative (behavioral and attitudinal) postures that emerge in response to the institutional definition of social, economic, and political life.” Finally, “community political culture” is defined as: “A set of informal adaptative (behavioral and attitudinal) postures that emerge in response to the historical relationships between regime and community.”⁸⁸ It is this author’s opinion that, of the three types of political culture discussed above, two – regime and community political cultures – are essential in explaining the collapse of communist rule in ECE. Instead of a classless society, in the Sovietized countries of ECE a dichotomous, adversarial picture of society gradually emerged. Those societies became increasingly polarized and divided into *us* (the population, including those members of the elite who turned against the regime) and *them* (the regime, i.e., the nomenklatura and the secret police, as well as those members of the elite – be it cultural, technical or military, who chose to remain faithful to it).

Consequently, the present work addresses the two major political cultures – regime and community – which became truly adversarial by the end of the 1980s, and which are understood in the terms of Jowitt’s frame of analysis. (At the same time, one should mention that these two political cultures were not fundamentally adversarial throughout the entire communist period.) It should be stressed once again that the present work is concerned with both beliefs and actions,

⁸⁸ Jowitt, *The Leninist Extinction*, 51–52 and 54–56.

and thus addresses both the main attitudinal *and* behavioral patterns that emerged during the communist period at the regime and community levels. The interplay of these attitudinal and behavioral patterns determined the specific nature of the 1989 revolutions in each of the six countries discussed. In the terms of the present analysis, the regime political culture is understood as the official political culture, i.e., the political culture of the respective communist regime (Polish, Hungarian, East German, Czechoslovak, Bulgarian or Romanian). As far as the community political culture is concerned, the most significant for this discussion are its sub-cultures that, in the terms of the present analysis, are defined as the political cultures of resistance against the regime. Thus, the two nation-specific factors that determined the nature (violent or non-violent), as well as the outcome of the 1989 revolutions in ECE are: (1) *the political culture of the respective communist regime*; and (2) *the political culture(s) of resistance against that regime*.

A Discussion on the Nature of the 1989 Revolutions

The nature of the 1989 revolutions in ECE, i.e., negotiated or non-negotiated, violent or non-violent, was primarily determined by two important aspects of regime and, respectively, community political cultures: (1) the monolithism of the power elite and the problem of its subordination to, or emancipation from, the Soviet Union; and (2) the existence of political alternatives to the ruling power within society. Where the power elite was compelled to offer a “tacit deal” to the society at large due to an intricate interplay between path dependence, agency and contingency, political bargaining became a major element of both regime and community political cultures. As already mentioned, the revolutionary changes of 1989 originated in the camp of “national-accommodative” communist dictatorships, i.e. in Poland and Hungary. Looking back

at the moment of the communist takeovers, one can establish a relationship between the degree of destruction suffered by the countries under analysis during World War II and the level of violence applied by the Stalinist elite during the “revolution from above” carried out in the respective countries. A comparative study of the capital losses suffered by a series of countries in ECE during the war, relative to their national incomes in 1938 provides the following figures: Poland – 350 percent; Yugoslavia – 274 percent; Hungary – 194 percent; Czechoslovakia – 115 percent; Bulgaria – 33 percent; and Romania – 29 percent.⁸⁹ Poland and Hungary, which initiated the 1989 sequence of collapse, were the countries that suffered the most, alongside former Yugoslavia, during World War II. In these two countries, the power elite proved to be less monolithic and splits at the top did take place. Thus, in Poland splits at the top of the Polish United Workers Party (PWUP) occurred in 1956, 1970 and 1981. In Hungary, a split at the top of Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party’s (HSWP) permitted the 1956 Revolution to unfold instead of being brutally repressed immediately. Furthermore, the division between “softliners” and “hardliners” within the power elite made possible the “negotiated revolutions” in Poland and Hungary. In 1989, the solution of opening the negotiations with the political opposition was perceived at the time by the moderates within the ruling communist elites as the most appropriate way of surviving politically into the new order. The initiation of the Roundtable Talks in Poland marked the “strategic compromise” that led to a negotiated transition in that country and influenced the course of events in Hungary.

In the former GDR, the task of economic recovery was not only huge due to the high level of war destruction, but was also complicated further because of the Soviet dismantling of production facilities. For its part, Czechoslovakia ranked only the fourth in terms

⁸⁹ Quoted in Aldcroft and Morewood, *Economic Change in Eastern Europe*, 92.

of capital losses relative to its 1938 national income, as shown by the figures mentioned above. Therefore, when the communist takeovers occurred a significant discrepancy existed between the two countries in terms of initial economic conditions. In spite of such discrepancy, one can note a striking similarity between GDR and Czechoslovakia in terms of cohesion of the power elite and its subservience to the Soviet Union. In both countries, the ruling elites displayed a high degree of unity and when more or less significant splits at the top nevertheless occurred, emancipation from the Soviet Union never became an issue. The Stalinist power elites in Bulgaria and Romania, which did not face the enormous task of postwar reconstruction, proceeded to their “revolutions from above” by making extensive use of random terror. However, the difference between the two communist dictatorships was that the Romanian communists gradually emancipated themselves from Moscow after 1956, while the Bulgarian communists did not. These two countries were the last in a row to exit from communism during the revolutionary year 1989. Thus, one should note that in those countries where the power elites proved to be monolithic, either because of a higher degree of institutionalization of the ruling communist party (like in East Germany and Czechoslovakia) or due to a “patrimonial” type of state socialism (Bulgaria and Romania) the regime change was non-negotiated and occurred only in the favorable context determined by the “negotiated revolutions” in Poland and Hungary. The non-negotiated revolutions in East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria were also non-violent. It was only in Romania, where the communist power elite emancipated itself from the Soviet Union, that the repressive apparatus was given the order to fire at the anti-regime protesters and provoked a bloodbath in 1989.

Another major factor that determined the nature of regime change was related to the development of political alternatives to the communist power within the respective societies. This is not to say that the communist regimes in ECE collapsed due to dissident actions

or because of working-class protests. As Pollack and Wielgoths put it: "It is widely uncontroversial in the academic literature that dissidence, opposition, and even the mass protests in the fall of 1989 were not the decisive causes for the collapse of the system."⁹⁰ As Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan aptly observed, in comparison with opposition parties in Spain, Uruguay and Chile, which articulated alternative political programs before the regime change, the opposition groups in Central Europe did not devise alternative political programs before 1989.⁹¹ At the same time, the dissident networks that developed in Poland and Hungary prior to the revolutionary year 1989 did contribute to the negotiated nature of the regime change due to the fact that the structured opposition became a major political actor during the roundtable talks in both cases. In peasant societies that were practically modernized by the communist regimes, such as Romania and Bulgaria, opposition to the communist rule developed slowly. Clientelism and cooptation functioned quite well until the economic crisis made large segments of the population think in terms of biological survival. Dissident networks did not appear and cross-class alliances did not emerge in such societies. As a consequence, communist successor parties emerged as the most powerful contenders for power in post-communism both in Bulgaria and Romania.

It is this author's opinion that two fundamental features of the regime political culture determined practically the nature of the 1989 revolution in each of the six countries under discussion: (1) the cohesion of the power elite; and (2) the degree of emancipation of the respective elite from the Soviet Union. As shown above, the communist regimes that experienced early, though failed, attempts

⁹⁰ See Detlef Pollack and Jan Wielgoths, "Introduction" to idem, eds., *Dissent and Opposition in Communist Eastern Europe: Origins of Civil Society and Democratic Transition* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2004), xv. Hereafter quoted as *Dissent and Opposition in Communist Eastern Europe*.

⁹¹ Linz and Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*, 247.

at emancipating themselves from Moscow by establishing a national “path to socialism” and were confronted with major mass protests from below, adopted a negotiated solution in 1989. Those communist regimes whose power elites proved to be monolithic, but did not emancipate themselves from Moscow, went through non-negotiated but non-violent revolutions in 1989. In the Bulgarian case, however, it was a palace coup that preceded the 1989 revolution. Where the power elite was monolithic, but emancipated itself from Moscow, and this happened only in the case of communist Romania, the revolution was not only non-negotiated, but also violent, since the regime felt confident enough as to order the repression apparatus to shoot to kill and had its orders obeyed in the first stage of the revolution.

To conclude, there were three configurations linking the monolithism of the power elite with the degree of structuring of societal opposition and the level of emancipation from Moscow that emerged in 1989 and determined the nature of the respective revolutions, as follows: (1) factionalism of the power elite that provoked major splits at the top of the communist hierarchy and a structured societal opposition, in the conditions of a failed emancipation from Moscow led to “negotiated revolutions” (Poland and Hungary); (2) monolithism of the power elite and a less structured societal opposition, in the conditions of a lack of emancipation from Moscow led to non-negotiated non-violent revolutions, i.e. regime “implosion” or palace coup followed by unprecedented popular mobilization in support of the opposition (former GDR and Czechoslovakia; Bulgaria); and (3) monolithism of the power elite and a less structured societal opposition, in the conditions of the emancipation of the power elite from Moscow led to a non-negotiated and violent revolution (Romania).

Throughout the following chapters, the explanatory model presented above is consistently applied for explaining the most contested – though the sole truly violent – of the revolutions of 1989, i.e. the Romanian one.

Chapter 2

THE DECEMBER 1989 EVENTS IN ROMANIA

“What happened afterwards changes our view of what went before.” This statement by Garton Ash in the introductory chapter to his personal account on the revolutions of 1989 he witnessed in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin and Prague is even more appropriate for the Romanian case.¹ Conflicting recollections by direct participants, as well as by simple bystanders, led to the appearance of an enduring “Rashomon effect” in terms of public representations of the 1989 violent regime change in Romania.² The Romanian revolution of 1989 was probably the most contested of all the 1989 revolutions in

¹ Garton Ash, *The Magic Lantern*, 21.

² The “Rashomon effect” refers to contrasting, though perfectly plausible, accounts by observers of contested events, rooted in subjective understandings of the respective events. This effect is named after the movie *Rashomon* (1950) directed by the famous film director Akira Kurosawa, in which the murder of a Japanese nobleman is described by four witnesses, as well as by the victim itself via a medium, in mutually contradictory ways. Kurosawa’s movie is based on two short stories by Ryunosuke Akutagawa (1892–1927), entitled “In a Grove” and “Rashomon.” On the impact of this effect on the analysis of contested events such as contemporary school shootings in the United States, see Wendy D. Roth and Jal D. Mehta, “The *Rashomon* Effect: Combining Positivist and Interpretivist Approaches in the Analysis of Contested Events,” *Sociological Methods & Research* 31, No. 2 (November 2002): 131–173; <http://www.politics.ubc.ca/fileadmin/template/main/images/departments/soci/faculty/roth/RashomonEffect.pdf>; (accessed 1 November 2009).

ECE, although the main ingredients of a true, classic revolution, i.e. “violence, bloodshed and tyrannicide” – as J. F. Brown wonderfully put it,³ were present only in the Romanian case. This chapter is structured on two parts. The first part addresses the main interpretations of the 1989 regime change in Romania, including a brief episode of *ego-histoire*, in order to illustrate the enduring “Rashomon effect” that characterizes the general process of reflecting on the December 1989 events in this country. *A fost sau n-a fost?* (Was it, or not?) is the title of a Romanian feature film directed by Corneliu Porumboiu (b. 1975) and released in 2006, which grasps masterly the highly controversial legacy of the 1989 regime change in Romania. In fact, the disarmingly simple question “Was it, or not?” epitomizes the controversial nature of the Romanian revolution of 1989.⁴ The second part of this chapter provides a concise event-centered historical reconstruction of the December 1989 events in Timișoara and Bucharest based primarily on the recollections of the participants to those events. The historical reconstruction provided here, which does not pretend to be comprehensive – such an endeavor would go much beyond the capabilities of an individual researcher – is meant to illustrate the fact that people in the street perceived the 1989 events as revolutionary. At the time, many were convinced that a revolution was sparked under their eyes and wanted to take part to it. It is also true that “what happened afterwards,” i.e. the coming to power of the second- and third- rank apparatchiks, changed the view of large segments of the population of “what went before,” i.e. in December 1989.

³ J. F. Brown, *The End of Communist Rule in Eastern Europe*, 1.

⁴ Corneliu Porumboiu, *A fost sau n-a fost?* (Was it, or not?), 89 min., 2006; the movie was internationally released as *12:08 East of Bucharest*.

“Was it, or not?”
Conflicting Interpretations of the Romanian 1989

During my doctoral studies at the Central European University in Budapest I had the chance to meet Dan Țura, a participant to the University Square demonstration of 21 December 1989, and listen to his amazing story about the initiation of the December 1989 revolution in Bucharest. While listening to Dan, I realized that his vivid recollections of his participation to the open protest that emerged on 21 December 1989 in the University Square in downtown Bucharest represented in fact that special kind of account of an exceptional individual experience, which practitioners of *microstoria* use to call *l'eccezionale normale*. On the one hand, his story represents a seeming anomaly within the general context of the bloody 1989 revolution in Romania. On the other hand, such a story sheds light on the way ordinary people responded when history suddenly started to accelerate itself in those days of 21–22 December 1989. After the mass rally organized by the regime in the Palace Square ended in chaos, a relative numerous group of demonstrators gathered in the University Square, in the very center of Bucharest, and initiated a public protest. At the time, Țura was working at an institute situated nearby the University Square. Thus, when protesters gathered there and started to shout anti-Ceaușescu and anti-regime slogans he joined them. He was aware that he was taking part to a revolution, which was the experience of a lifetime, and therefore he wanted to take full advantage of that unique opportunity. At the same time, that particular day of 21 December was payday. Consequently, Țura shouted against the regime for a while and then returned to his workplace to find out if the payment of salaries had begun. The money did not arrive yet so that he returned to the University Square and rejoined the revolution. After some time he returned to the institute and was happy to find out that the money

had finally arrived. So, he got his salary. Immediately afterwards, his first thought was to go back to the University Square, but he recalled that he had promised to his family that he would buy a fir tree for the Christmas celebration, which was approaching. Consequently, he rushed to the closest market, the Amzei Market, bought a fir tree and returned to the University Square. Holding firmly the fir tree in one hand, he rejoined the protesters until dark fell and the repression troops began firing at the demonstrators. At that moment, he thought that it was too risky to remain in the University Square and consequently ran home.⁵ Dan Țura's account of the initiation of the 1989 revolution in Bucharest reminds us of the confusion, uncertainty and ambiguity that characterized the Romanian 1989 due to superposition of two streams of events. On the one hand, history began to accelerate itself due to the outbreak of open contestation of Ceaușescu's rule and the chain of rapidly unfolding events it generated, while on the other hand the normal course of everyday life continued to unfold slowly and prosaically like in any other regular day. At the same time, the Romanian revolution of 1989 consisted actually of two revolutions that unfolded almost simultaneously and often crossed their paths influencing one another: a *bloody* revolution carried out in the streets of a few major cities and a *thrilling* one witnessed by a majority of the population in front of the TV sets. It may be argued that the Romanian revolution of 1989 had three major features that made it so special in the context of the 1989 revolutions in ECE: it *occurred unexpectedly*, *unfolded violently* and had an *ambiguous outcome*.

Romanian communism was of a "patrimonial" type and gave birth to a modernizing-nationalizing dictatorship. The communist power elite proved to be monolithic up to the very end of the regime and this is why Romania's exit from communism was violent and non-negotiated. For its part, the political opposition was too weak to

⁵ Dan Țura, interview by the author, August 1999, Budapest.

emerge as a strong contender for power during the revolution. Thus, the first free elections held on 20 May 1990 were won by the second- and third-rank *nomenklatura* members, who constantly defined themselves as a “genuine” emanation of the 1989 revolution. Sparked unexpectedly and ensued violently, the 1989 revolution brought eventually to power a mixture of communist reformers and technocrats under the leadership of a former apparatchik, Ion Iliescu. As a consequence, dissatisfaction with the newly established power elite and therefore with the outcome of the 1989 revolution in Romania was particularly high among the educated urban strata. Somehow unexpectedly, the bulk of the population enthusiastically supported Ion Iliescu and his party, the National Salvation Front (NSF). Consequently, the political opposition, supported by public intellectuals and the emerging civil society, articulated two conflicting visions of the post-1945 period, in which the interpretation of the recent past (the communist period March 1945 – December 1989) differed fundamentally from that of the immediate past (the violent regime change of 16–22 December 1989).

The vision of the communist period that emerged powerfully was one centred on prisons, surveillance and shortages, which became instrumental in stressing the continuities between the Ceaușescu and Iliescu regimes in an attempt at convincing the population not to vote anymore in the next general elections for Iliescu and his NSF. At the same time, the democratic opposition and the emerging civil society adopted an overcritical approach to the December 1989 regime change by contesting, if not by utterly denying, the revolutionary nature of those events. The adoption of such a stance by the political opposition and civic groups was also prompted by the fact that the “neo-communists” of Iliescu spoke of 1989 as a true revolution and presented themselves as authentic revolutionaries. Foreign scholars were equally critical towards the Romanian revolution of 1989. For instance, Garton Ash wrote in 1999 that the Romanian revolution of 1989 “was the only one that

wasn't,"⁶ and he was by no means alone in his sharp criticism of the nature and outcome of the 1989 events in Romania. Some have used the word revolution in quotation marks in order to emphasize its ambiguities, while others went even further and stated openly that in December 1989 Romania witnessed a sheer coup d'état.

There were the unsolved "mysteries" of the 1989 regime change in Romania and the protracted transition to a democratic polity that added to the wave of contestation and even denial of the revolutionary character of those events. It is important to stress that more blood was spilled in Romania after the collapse of the communist regime – placed by a majority of the analysts at precisely 1208 hours on 22 December 1989, when Ceaușescu's helicopter took off from the upper platform of the building of the CC of the RCP – than before its demise. Innocent people were killed by unidentified "terrorists" during the period 22–25 December 1989, i.e. from the moment the Ceaușescu couple left the CC building and their hasten execution after a mock trial. As for the figures, one should note that out of the total number of victims officially registered in the 1989 events, i.e. 1,104 dead and 3,352 wounded, 942 died and 2,245 were wounded after 22 December.⁷ The intricacies of the 1989 Romanian revolution led to the emergence of various interpretations of those events.

Of these interpretations, the testimonies and witness accounts by those who participated directly to the events tend to support three major interpretations, as follows: (1) *1989 – An Authentic Revolution*.

⁶ Garton Ash, "Conclusions" to Antohi and Tismăneanu, eds., *The Revolutions of 1989*, 395.

⁷ On the official number of victims see Emil Constantinescu, *Adevărul despre România* (The truth about Romania) (Bucharest: Editura Universală, 2004), 113 and Costache Codrescu, ed., *Armata Română în revoluția din decembrie 1989* (The Romanian army in the December 1989 Revolution) 2nd rev. ed. (Bucharest: Editura Militară, 1998), 462. See also Stan Stoica, *România, 1989–2005: O istorie cronologică* (Romania, 1989–2005: A chronological history) (Bucharest: Editura Meronia, 2005), 19.

According to this interpretation, the 1989 events represented a genuine revolution, initiated by the spontaneous mass revolt of the population, especially in Timișoara and Bucharest. Such a view of the events has been shared since December 1989 by numerous representatives of the newly established NSF and a major part of the revolutionaries who poured into the streets and confronted the repressive forces; (2) *1989 – A Confiscated Revolution*. This interpretation emerged during the first half of the year 1990 and was put forward by disenchanted critical intellectuals and revolutionaries, and was endorsed by numerous bystanders who watched the 1989 events on TV. This interpretation reads as follows: the popular revolt was confiscated by second- and third-rank nomenklatura members who benefited mainly from Soviet support, and thus the 1989 revolution was never completed. This view of the December 1989 events became more structured after the victory of the NSF in the first post-communist elections of 20 May 1990 and the repression of the protesters in the University Square in Bucharest on 13–15 June the same year; and (3) *1989 – An International Conspiracy*. This interpretation contends that the events of 1989 were the direct result of an international conspiracy conducted from abroad by the intelligence agencies of the two superpowers with the complicity of some segments of the party, secret police and the military. This version of the events has been supported mainly by former members of the communist secret police (the Securitate) and the military, as well as by journalists.⁸

⁸ A detailed taxonomy of the discourses on the 1989 events, written from the perspective of literary studies, has been authored by Cesereanu, who classifies the discourses on the 1989 revolution as follows: (1) The purists: 1.1 Those in power; 1.2 Those outside the power circle; and 1.3 Other voices; (2) The conspiracy theory: 2.1 The external plot; 2.2 The internal plot; and (3) The thesis of a revolution hybridized with a coup d'état. See Ruxandra Cesereanu, *Decembrie '89: Deconstrucția unei revoluții* (December 1989: The deconstruction of a revolution) (Iași: Editura Polirom, 2004), 63–180.

1989 – An Authentic Revolution. Major figures of the NSF, as well as genuine revolutionaries, argued that Romania did experience an authentic revolution in 1989. For the prominent members of the NSF who served under the Ceaușescu regime, their participation to the 1989 regime change on the part of the revolted masses constituted the only legitimizing element for continuing their careers under the new political order. For them, what happened in December 1989 was nothing else than a true revolution to which they took part actively. At the same time, most of the genuine revolutionaries who demonstrated against the regime and many of whom faced the bloody repression have been clearly in favor of considering those events a revolution.

High-ranking members of the first post-communist regime, such as President Ion Iliescu or Prime Minister Petre Roman wrote in their memoirs about their involvement in, and the nature of, the 1989 revolution. Iliescu has constantly affirmed that what happened in 1989 was a revolution sparked by the popular uprising in Timișoara and completed by the population of Bucharest which poured into the streets in large numbers on 22 December.⁹ In his memoirs, Roman supports the idea of a genuine revolution while stressing that the population was not prepared for such an event and this led to much vacillation and guesswork.¹⁰ Siviu Brucan, a close collaborator of Iliescu and a key figure of the NSF in the early 1990s also supports the revolution thesis.¹¹ Sergiu Nicolaescu, a post-1989 politician close to Iliescu, has provided his own account of the 1989

⁹ Ion Iliescu, *Revoluție și reformă* (Revolution and reform) (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 1994), 12–13; and idem, *Revoluția trăită* (A lived revolution) (Bucharest: Editura Redacției publicațiilor pentru străinătate, 1995), 13.

¹⁰ Petre Roman, *Libertatea ca datorie* (Freedom as duty) (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Dacia, 1994), 105.

¹¹ Silviu Brucan, *Generația irosită: Memorii* (The wasted generation: Memoirs) (Bucharest: Universul & Calistrat Hogaș, 1992), 208–19.

events. According to Nicolaescu, the “historic moment” of the Romanian 1989 occurred on 22 December between 1600 and 1730 hours when the anti-Ceaușescu revolt was turned into an anti-communist revolution by the protesters gathered in front of the CC of the RCP building.¹²

As for the revolutionaries in the streets, one should mention the name of Marius Mioc who has been extremely active in researching and disseminating firsthand information about the 1989 revolution in Timișoara. Time and again, Mioc has affirmed that in 1989 Romania witnessed an authentic revolution and due to his constant efforts numerous witness accounts and documents related to the inception of the revolution were published.¹³ Writer and journalist Stelian Tănase wrote about his 1989 revolutionary experience in Bucharest. Thus, he recalls the moment when he reached the Magheru Boulevard shortly after the Bucharest protests had started:

¹² Sergiu Nicolaescu, *Revoluția – Începutul adevărului: Un raport personal* (The revolution – The beginning of the truth: A personal report) (Bucharest: Editura Topaz, 1995), 50.

¹³ Marius Mioc, *Revoluția din Timișoara și falsificatorii istoriei* (The revolution in Timișoara and the falsifiers of history) (Timișoara: Editura Sedona, 1999). See also idem, *The Anticommunist Romanian Revolution of 1989 – Written for people with little knowledge about Romania* (Timișoara: Marineasa Publishing House, 2004); idem, *Revoluția din 1989 și minciunile din Jurnalul Național: Mitul agenturilor străine, Mitul Securității atotputernice* (The revolution of 1989 and the lies in [newspaper] Jurnalul Național: The myth of foreign agencies and the myth of the almighty Securitate) (Timișoara: Editura Marineasa, 2005); idem, ed., *Revoluția, fără mistere: Cazul László Tökés – Documente din arhiva Judecătoriei Timișoara; Documente din arhiva parohiei reformate Timișoara; Mărturii* (The revolution, void of mysteries: The László Tökés case – Documents from the archive of the Timișoara Court of Justice; Documents from the archive of the Timișoara Reformed Parish Church; Testimonies) (Timișoara: Editura “Almanahul Banatului,” 2002); and idem, ed., *Procesele revoluției din Timișoara, 1989: Documente istorice* (Trials of the revolution in Timișoara, 1989: Historical documents) (Timișoara: Editura Artpress, 2004).

"The Magheru Boulevard was blocked by the special brigades equipped with shields and helmets and, some meters away, were hundreds of people who shouted, indeed, 'Ceaușescu,' but... 'Down with!' My first sensation was that of astonishment." It was amazing, Tănase observes, to see how rapidly people in the street became radicalized and organized themselves.¹⁴

1989 – A Confiscated Revolution. Democratic political opposition to the NSF and the emerging civil society, as well as numerous disenchanted critical intellectuals and scholars from Romania and abroad, have been at the origin of the interpretation of the 1989 events as a revolution initiated by the population of Timișoara and which was subsequently "confiscated" in the capital city Bucharest. According to this version, the 1989 events unfolded in two phases: the genuine revolution that originated in Timișoara was followed by a coup d'état that took place in Bucharest. Such an interpretation has been also supported by participants to the events, journalists and by significant strata of the general public. Talk-shows have concentrated on such scenarios that proved to be extremely popular with large audiences. In this respect, one can mention the series of fifteen TV roundtables dedicated by journalist Vartan Arachelian to the "mysteries" of the 1989 revolution, whose transcripts were subsequently published in a volume. During one of the aforementioned roundtables, a journalist affirmed bluntly: "A revolution that started in Timișoara was killed by a coup d'état."¹⁵ In a similar vein, Dumitru Mazilu, a former second-rank nomenklatura member who became critical towards Ceaușescu's rule in the 1980s, has argued in his book of memoirs that the 1989 revolution was simply "stolen." Mazilu,

¹⁴ Stelian Tănase, "Solstițiu însîngerat la București" (Bloody solstice in Bucharest), in *Șocuri și crize* (Shocks and crises) (Bucharest: Editura Staff, 1993), 5, 9.

¹⁵ Statement by journalist Sorin Roșca Stănescu. See Vartan Arachelian, *În fața dumneavoastră: Revoluția și personajele sale* (In front of you: The revolution and its characters) (Bucharest: Editura Nemira, 1998), 243.

who was co-opted to the leadership of the NSF on 22 December 1989 after the fall of Ceaușescu, distanced himself from Iliescu in January 1990.¹⁶ The idea of a “stolen” or “diverted” revolution has been generally expressed by a large number of Romanian, as well as foreign, authors by using the term revolution in quotation marks.¹⁷

1989 – An International Conspiracy. After 1989, conspiracy theories and absurd scenarios also filled the pages of the newly established newspapers, journals and magazines. Numerous publications nurtured the idea that the Ceaușescu regime was brought down by a conspiracy involving major foreign secret services, including the KGB and the CIA, with the support of local figures from the party, military and the secret police. A brief survey of the conspiracy theories put forward immediately after the fall of the Ceaușescu regime has been provided in a volume by Perva and Roman.¹⁸ The thesis of an international conspiracy has been particularly supported by former Securitate agents, as well as by employees of the post-communist secret services. For instance, Filip Teodorescu, a former deputy of the head of the counterintelligence

¹⁶ Dumitru Mazilu, *Revoluția furată: De la totalitarism spre libertate – Memoriu pentru țara mea* (The stolen revolution: From totalitarianism to freedom – A memorandum for my country) (Bucharest: Editura Cozia, 1991). Former dissident Dorin Tudoran stated that in December 1989 a coup d'état hindered the popular uprising in becoming a revolution. Tudoran, *Kakistocrația*, 519. A gifted émigré analyst of the communist power in Romania argued that the second echelon of the nomenklatura confiscated a revolution carried out mainly by the anticommunist young generations and consequently coined the term “gunned down revolution” to characterize the 1989 events in Romania. See Victor Frunză, *Revoluția împușcată sau P.C.R. după 22 decembrie 1989* (The gunned down revolution or the RCP after 22 December 1989) (Bucharest: Editura Victor Frunză, 1994), 7–14 and 23–25.

¹⁷ To emphasize the ambiguous character of the 1989 events in Romania, some scholars used the term revolution in quotation marks. See Katherine Verdery and Gail Kligman, “Romania after Ceaușescu: Post-Communist Communism?” in Ivo Banac, ed., *Eastern Europe in Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 117.

¹⁸ Perva and Roman, *The mysteries of the Romanian revolution*.

section of the Securitate asserted in his book of memoirs that the violent events of December 1989 were stirred from outside the country, following an agreement between “West and East,” i.e., between the United States and the Soviet Union.¹⁹ Niculae Mavru, the former head of the Surveillance and Investigation Section of the Timișoara branch of the Securitate, supports a similar version insisting on the Soviet involvement,²⁰ while a volume authored by Valentin Raiha denounces the 1989 events as a coup d’état organized by the military with the support of the Soviet Union.²¹ Witness accounts by participants to the revolution have supported such views. For instance, Constantin Vasile’s book, which focuses on the unfolding of events in the city of Sibiu, concludes that Romania witnessed in 1989 a coup d’état organized by the military.²² Alex Mihai Stoenescu features prominently among the authors who consistently supported the thesis of an international conspiracy that provoked the demise of the Ceaușescu regime in 1989. In this respect, one should mention the book length interview realized by Stoenescu with Virgil Măgureanu – the first director of the post-communist Romanian

¹⁹ Filip Teodorescu, *Un risc asumat: Timișoara, decembrie 1989* (A risk undertaken: Timișoara, December 1989) (Bucharest: Editura Viitorul Românesc, 1992), 43–51. For the idea that an international conspiracy led by the CIA and the KGB provoked the fall of Ceaușescu in 1989 see also Cornel Armean, *De ce a fost ucis? Ar fi împlinit 75 de ani* (Why was he killed? He would have turned 75) (n.p.: Editura Alfabetul, 1993), 164–65.

²⁰ Niculae Mavru, *Revoluția din stradă: Amintirile fostului șef al Serviciului de Filaj și Investigație de la Timișoara* (The revolution in the street: Memoirs of the former head of the Timișoara Surveillance and Investigation section) (Bucharest: Editura Rao, 2004), 60–64.

²¹ Valentin Raiha, *În decembrie '89 KGB a aruncat în aer România cu complicitatea unui grup de militari* (In December 1989, the KGB blew Romania up with the complicity of a group of militaries) (Bucharest: Editura Ziua – Omega Press Investment, 1995).

²² Constantin Vasile, *Noi am fost teroriștii?!* (Have we been the terrorists?!)(Sibiu: Editura Sibguard, 1995).

Intelligence Service (*Serviciul Român de Informații* – SRI), in which Măgureanu and Stoenescu agree upon the idea of an implication of foreign secret services in the initiation of the mass protest in Bucharest on 21 December 1989.²³

From late December 1989 onwards, numerous critical intellectuals, generally siding with the political opposition, have seriously questioned or even denied the revolutionary nature of the 1989 events. As shown above, the political opposition, emerging civil society and public intellectuals were not able to persuade the bulk of the population to vote for the “democratic opposition” instead of Iliescu’s “neo-communists.” Up to the year 1996 when the united opposition came to power, dissatisfaction with the outcome of the 1989 regime change was accompanied by appeals to proceed to a new revolution, meant to finally oust the “neo-communists” from power. It was in that particular political context that the general view of a 1989 Romanian revolution that calls for qualifying in order to stress its ambiguities, if not its utter failure, was born. It should be emphasized once again that such a reading of the 1989 events, which has remained powerful to this day in spite of the power shift of 1996, was primarily due to the dissatisfaction with the *outcome* of the 1989 events mostly among the urban educated strata.

A sharp criticism towards such an attitude by a majority of the Romanian public intellectuals towards the 1989 events came in the year 2000 from a former dissident philosopher. That year, in the final round of the presidential elections in Romania Iliescu competed with the ultra-nationalist leader of the Greater Romania Party, Corneliu Vadim Tudor. With that occasion, the Hungarian intellectual and former dissident G. M. Tamás – who was born in Romania – addressed an open letter to his Romanian friends, which

²³ Virgil Măgureanu with Alex Mihai Stoenescu, *De la regimul comunist la regimul Iliescu: Virgil Măgureanu în dialog cu Alex Mihai Stoenescu* (From the communist regime to the Iliescu regime: Virgil Măgureanu in dialogue with Alex Mihai Stoenescu) (Bucharest: Editura Rao, 2008), 116–22.

sparked a heated debate and triggered responses from many Romanian public intellectuals. The most relevant replies, accompanied by Tamás' open letter, were subsequently published together in a volume.²⁴ In his letter, Tamás observed among other things that the Romanian intellectuals consistently denied the revolutionary character of the 1989 events because the outcome of the regime change was different from what they expected. In Hungary, Tamás further argued, the Revolution of 1956 also left numerous questions unanswered even after so many years but nobody dares to affirm that it was not a true revolution because of that. Thus, the Romanian intellectuals have destroyed the memory of a great accomplishment in Romanian history and with this the founding myth of the new and democratic Romanian polity. As Tamás puts it:

You, my dear friends, who did not like the political consequences (unpleasant, indeed) of the revolution, managed to convince an entire world that *the revolution, in fact, did not even take place*, that it was about a trick, a fata morgana, a hallucination, a foul play, a prank and, by making use of the deceitful poetic means of negative mythologizing, succeeded in obscuring the biggest historical deed of the Romanian people only because, like in all revolutions, there was too much buffoonery, chatty talk, too much chaos [emphasis added].²⁵

The constant denial of the revolutionary character of the regime change in Romania determined to a great extent the way in which the 1989 revolution is remembered nowadays in this country. One can go even further and argue that the process of reflecting on the 1989 phenomenon in Romania focuses almost entirely on its ambiguities

²⁴ See Mircea Vasilescu, ed., *Intellectualul român față cu inacțiunea: În jurul unei scrisori a lui G. M. Tamás* (The Romanian intellectual face with inaction: Replicas to a letter by G. M. Tamás) (Bucharest: Editura Curtea Veche, 2002); for Tamás' open letter see pp. 11–20.

²⁵ G. M. Tamás, "Scrisoare către prietenii mei români" (Letter to my Romanian friends), in *Replicas to a letter by G. M. Tamás*, 16.

and confusions, and leads more often than not to the sheer denial of its revolutionary character. It is the purpose of the next section to present a concise event-centered historical reconstruction of the 1989 events in Timișoara and Bucharest, based primarily on witness accounts, which is meant to illustrate the fact that at the time a majority of the participants perceived those events as revolutionary.

December 1989 An Event-Centered Historical Reconstruction

The 1989 revolution began in Timișoara during the night of 16/17 December. A peaceful demonstration by a small group of believers, in their majority of Hungarian ethnicity, gathered around the house of Reverend László Tökés, preceded the revolution. Tökés, a rebellious minister of the Protestant church, was supposed to be forcibly evacuated from the house he occupied – property of the Protestant Church – due to a decision signed by the Oradea Diocesan, Bishop László Papp. At the origins of such a decision stayed Tökés' religious activism and his militant stance concerning the rights of the Hungarian minority in Romania. Such activities annoyed both the communist authorities and the leadership of the Protestant Church, and led to an open conflict between Tökés and Bishop Papp.²⁶

²⁶ See Diocesan László Papp, "Scurtă caracterizare a preotului Tökés László" (Short characterization of Reverend Tökés László), dated 14 August 1989, in Marius Mioc, ed., *Revoluția, fără mistere: Cazul László Tökés – Documente din arhiva Judecătorei Timișora; Documente din arhiva parohiei reformate Timișoara; Mărturii* (The revolution, void of mysteries: The László Tökés case – Documents from the archive of the Timișoara Court of Justice; Documents from the archive of the Timișoara Reformed Parish Church; Testimonies) (Timișoara: Editura "Almanahul Banatului," 2002), 144–45.

Eventually, Tökés was released from the position he held in Timișoara and assigned to a new post in Mineu (Sălaj County), a small locality in Northern Transylvania.²⁷ However, he refused to leave the apartment he occupied in the parish house located in Timișoara on the Timotei Cipariu Street at No. 1, near the Maria Square.²⁸ On 10 December 1989, after the Mass, Reverend Tökés announced the churchgoers from his parish that he was ordered to evacuate the parish house on 15 December and asked them to come and witness the forced evacuation.²⁹ Consequently, on Friday, 15 December 1989, a rather small group of churchgoers gathered around the three-level (ground floor and two stories) parish house in the Timotei Cipariu Street.³⁰

As already mentioned, on 15 December, the crowd was initially composed of members of the Hungarian minority who showed their support for their spiritual leader. According to a witness account, there were around one hundred persons in the front of the parish house: a few Hungarian-Romanian families and some Romanians, mostly men. In the evening, around 1900 hours, a part of those gathered there sang “Deșteaptă-te române” (Awake thee, Romanian!),

²⁷ Republica Socialistă România, Judecătoria Timișoara, Dosar 9001/1989, Sentința civilă nr. 7190 din 20 octombrie 1989 (Socialist Republic of Romania, the Timișoara Court of Justice, File 9001/1989, Sentence no. 7190 of 20 October 1989); and Republica Socialistă România, Tribunalul Județean Timiș, Dosar 2339/1989, Decizia civilă nr. 1474 din 28 noiembrie 1989 (Socialist Republic of Romania, the Timiș County Court of Justice, File 2339/1989, Judicial decision no. 1474 of 28 November 1989), in Mioc, ed., *The revolution, void of mysteries*, 166–74 and 194–97 respectively.

²⁸ For the layout of the quarter where the Mary Square is located see the map in Marius Mioc, *Revoluția din Timișoara și falsificatorii istoriei* (The revolution in Timișoara and the falsifiers of history) (Timișoara: Editura Sedona, 1999), 253.

²⁹ Ibid., 19. See also Miodrag Milin, “Azi în Timișoara, mâine-n toată țara!” (Today in Timișoara, tomorrow in the whole country!), in *Timișoara: 16–22 Decembrie 1989* (Timișoara: Editura Facla, 1990), 46.

³⁰ For a description and a photograph of the house see Ibid., 100–101.

a song born of the 1848 revolution and considered a dissident song by the end of the Ceaușescu rule, which would become the anthem of post-1989 democratic Romania. A witness, Victor Burghilea, recalls what he felt at that moment: “I could not believe, it was phenomenal.”³¹ Many revolutionaries affirm that the moment when “Awake thee, Romanian!” was first sung in the Mary Square proved to be crucial.³² Nevertheless, there were not many those who could foresee the way the events would evolve. Tökés himself has confessed that his actions were not intended to provoke the downfall of the regime: “I am ashamed of not having such a bold-spirited idea, all the more that the minority churches did not envisage such ideas. Our scope was to survive.”³³

On Saturday, 16 December in the morning, things seemed to calm down. At least this was the impression of physician Dan Ștefan Oprea, who walked by the Mary Square that morning.³⁴ In the afternoon, however, people started to come back. A witness recalls that it was about 1500 hours when the crowd uttered the first “Down with Ceaușescu!” slogans.³⁵ Around 1700 hours – as Aurelian David Mihut recalls – the square was packed with people and the traffic through the intersection became difficult. A small group started to sing “Hora Unirii” (The union round dance), a highly symbolic Romanian song, the anthem of the 1859 union between Wallachia and Moldavia which set the foundation of the modern Romanian state.³⁶ Around 1900 hours, someone performed the first act of courage by pulling down the pantograph’s rope of a tram that passed

³¹ See the account of Victor Burghilea in Mioc, *The revolution in Timișoara*, 57.

³² See Daniel Vighi’s comment in Miodrag Milin, *Timișoara în revoluție și după* (Timișoara in revolution and after) (Timișoara: Editura Marineasa, 1997), 27–28.

³³ László Tökés, “A Dialogue with László Tökés,” interview by Marius Mioc (Timișoara, 2 November 2001), in *Ibid.*, 77.

³⁴ Milin, *Timișoara in revolution and after*, 18.

³⁵ See the account of Gazda Arpad in Mioc, *The revolution in Timișoara*, 10.

³⁶ For Mihut’s account, see Milin, *Timișoara in revolution and after*, 24.

through the intersection, so that the traffic was blocked.³⁷ There were around 1,000 people in the Mary Square at that moment, as Ștefan Iordănescu remembers, an evaluation confirmed by sources from the Ministry of Internal Affairs.³⁸ From that moment on, the events unfolded rapidly. People from the crowd started to shout slogans such as: “Libertate!” (Freedom!), “Jos Ceaușescu!” (Down with Ceaușescu!), “Jos dictatorul!” (Down with the dictator!), and “Acum ori niciodată!” (Now, or never!). A column of around 1,000 people started to march towards downtown, while a small group of believers, approx. 200, remained in the front of Tökés’ house.³⁹ The demonstration against the forced evacuation of Reverend Tökés had already turned into a demonstration against the Ceaușescu regime, increasingly joined by the population of Timișoara. Subsequently, the anti-Ceaușescu demonstration developed into an anti-Communist revolution.

In order to have an idea of the sequence and localization of events, some remarks concerning the layout of Timișoara’s center would be useful. Furthermore, since the Opera House would become Timișoara’s landmark as far as the 1989 revolution is concerned, the location of other buildings, squares, streets and quarters will be given below in relation to the Opera Square and the Bega Canal. On the north-south axis, the Bega Canal, an artificial waterway, cuts the city of Timișoara into two parts. Timișoara’s downtown is north of the waterway so that the main official and monument buildings – the

³⁷ According to Miodrag Milin, Tiberiu Kovács, a worker at the 6 Martie (6 March) enterprise and Ion Monoran, a poet, were those who stopped the trams in the Mary Square. See Miodrag Milin, *Timișoara in revolution and after*, 24 and 205. For more on this see footnote 12 in Mioc, *The revolution, void of mysteries*, 52.

³⁸ Quoted in Milin, “Azi în Timișoara, mâine-n toată țara!” 53. See also General Ion Pitulescu, ed., *Șase zile care au zguduit România: Ministerul de Interne în decembrie 1989* (Six days that shook Romania: The Ministry of Internal Affairs in December 1989) (Bucharest: n.p., 1995), 76.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 54.

town hall, the RCP County Council, the Opera Hall, and the Orthodox Cathedral, lie north of the Bega Canal. Mary Square is located south of the Bega Canal and southwest of the Opera Square, while the Students' Complex is located south of the Canal and southeast of the Opera Square. The access over the Bega Canal on the north-south axis is realized, from the east to the west, through four main bridges: the Mary Bridge, the Mihai Viteazul Bridge, the Michelangelo Bridge, and the Decebal Bridge. Consequently, in order to reach the main symbols of communist power, i.e., the town hall and the RCP County Council, the initial protesters gathered in the Mary Square had to cross the Canal.

In order to suppress the protest, the communist authorities mobilized progressively the local Militia forces, the Securitate troops, the Fire Brigades and the Border Guards (since 12 December 1989 the Border Guards were under the direct command of the Ministry of Internal Affairs).⁴⁰ Securitate agents in plain clothes infiltrated the protesters in Mary Square. The first clashes between the protesters and the repressive forces – supported by fire engines and Militia troops, took place sporadically between 1900 and 2100 hours on Saturday 16 December. The protesters threw stones and empty milk bottles at the riot police. Shop windows were broken and a number of shops were devastated. The window of the “Mihail Sadoveanu” bookstore was also broken and Ceaușescu's works were set on fire.⁴¹ Also, protesters managed to climb on some fire engines and set them on fire.

Meanwhile, the crowds were slowly moving towards the Bega Canal, in order to reach the town hall and the building of the RCP County Council. After 2100 hours the efforts to contain the revolt increased in intensity. At the same time, the revolted crowd was joined by numerous city dwellers. It may be argued that technically the

⁴⁰ Codrescu, ed., *The Romanian army in the 1989 Revolution*, 49–50.

⁴¹ Pitulescu, ed., *The Ministry of Internal Affairs in December 1989*, 79.

revolution in Timișoara started on Saturday, 16 December 1989 after 2100 hours, when large groups of demonstrators began their march towards the city center. As many of the participants recall, it was a sort of a dangerous ballet, in which protesters and repression troops were clashing in clouds of tear gas, under the jets of water pouring from the water canons. Vehicles were set on fire. Cobblestones and empty bottles were thrown at the riot police. Groups of protesters dispersed and regrouped in the anemic light.⁴² All in all, the night of 16/17 December 1989 was hallucinating: angered crowds wandered through the shadowy streets of Timișoara while riot police troops, military patrols, militia officers, and Securitate agents in plain clothes followed and fought them, and operated arrests. The building of the RCP County Council was attacked. Nevertheless, there was not a carefully planned operation from the part of the protesters. As a participant to the events remarked, during the manifestations of 16 December he was haunted by the same old question: "What is to be done?"⁴³ Vasile Popovici recalls that it was a rather chaotic movement in semi-darkness. He could not foresee where from the next attack would come and had a constant fear of being caught at any time.⁴⁴ According to military sources, that night around 180 people were arrested.⁴⁵

Next day, Sunday, 17 December in the morning, the city seemed calm, although the traces of the last night clashes could be seen all

⁴² See for instance, the account of Vasile Popovici in Milin, *Timișoara in revolution and after*, 14–15.

⁴³ See the account of Dan Ștefan Opreș in Milin, *Timișoara in revolution and after*, 34–43, which is one of the most coherent and perceptive regarding the events of 16/17 December 1989.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴⁵ Codrescu, ed., *The Romanian army in the 1989 Revolution*, 50. Reverend Tökés was forcibly evacuated from his house the same night of 16/17 December, during the interval 0300–0400 hours. Pitulescu, ed., *The Ministry of Internal Affairs in December 1989*, 76.

over the place. Militia and army troops, however, were in control of the city center. Traian Orban, a revolutionary, remembers that he crossed the Michelangelo Bridge and was heading towards the Opera Square when he saw regular army troops guarding the access towards the city center. The time was about 1330 hours. He also recalls that he saw a group of 600–800 protesters, mainly young, shouting slogans such as “Freedom!” and “Down with Ceaușescu!” Around 1500 hours, the military adopted a more aggressive stance and, supported by armored vehicles, attempted at dispersing the demonstrators. A few tanks also appeared on the street. With empty hands, young revolutionaries tried to immobilize them. Others, however, prepared Molotov cocktails. Apparently, it was a similar cat-and-mouse game like the one played the previous night, but this time it was much more dangerous. The events Orban witnessed were taking place in the Liberty Square, which is located north of city center, behind the Opera Square. In that area, at approx. 1620 hours, the first shots were fired at the revolutionaries.⁴⁶

Information gathered by corroborating different testimonies indicates that it was after 1600 hours on 17 December 1989 when the first isolated shots were fired at the Timișoara protesters.⁴⁷ It might be argued therefore that the troops in Timișoara fired at the protesters before the meeting of the Executive Political Committee of the CC of the RCP, held on 17 December from 1700 hours onwards. During that meeting, Ceaușescu repeatedly asked that the troops be given real ammunition and the protest be repressed in the shortest time: “I told you to shoot.... So, take immediate measures

⁴⁶ Traian Orban (b. 1944) is a key witness for the events in Timișoara. After 1989 he became the president of the association “Memorialul revoluției” (Memorial of the revolution) in Timișoara. For his version of the events see, Mioc, *The revolution in Timișoara*, 43–46 and Milin, *Timișoara in revolution and after*, 59–63.

⁴⁷ See also the account of Nicolae Bădilescu in Milin, *Timișoara in revolution and after*, 75–76.

to liquidate quickly what happens in Timișoara.”⁴⁸ During the teleconference with the county Party secretaries Ceaușescu referred to the events in Timișoara as an “attempt at an anti-socialist coup d’état.”⁴⁹ Meanwhile, other revolutionaries, shouting anti-Ceaușescu slogans and waving flags with a hole in the center – which meant that the communist coat of arms was removed, confronted the troops in the Opera Square in Timișoara. Night fell quickly and all of a sudden a systematic shooting began. Aurelian David Mihuț was at that moment in the front of the Orthodox Cathedral, just opposite to the Opera House. When the first shots were fired – it looked like they were coming from the Opera House – he moved towards the Cathedral, then ran to the Cathedral’s Park and crossed the Mihai Viteazul Bridge. While running he saw a girl lying on the pavement, shot dead in the head.⁵⁰ Rapid machine gun fire was heard until 0200–0300 hours during the night of 17/18 December. Then it started pouring with rain for almost an hour, an unusually heavy rain for the month of December, and the machine gun fire ceased. Timișoara’s population was under shock: innocent blood had been spilled.⁵¹

⁴⁸ See Codrescu, ed., *The Romanian army in the 1989 Revolution*, 126. For the complete transcript of that meeting see “Stenograma ședinței Comitetului Politic Executiv al C.C. al P.C.R. din ziua de 17 decembrie 1989” (The minutes of the meeting of the Executive Political Committee of the CC of the RCP of 17 December 1989), in Pitulescu, ed., *The Ministry of Internal Affairs in December 1989*, 188–200. After the meeting Ceaușescu convoked a teleconference with Party’s representatives at county level. For the transcript of the teleconference see *ibid.*, 202–204.

⁴⁹ Pitulescu, ed., *The Ministry of Internal Affairs in December 1989*, 204.

⁵⁰ See Milin, *Timișoara in revolution and after*, 66–69.

⁵¹ The shooting of civilians during the night of 17/18 December also led to one of the most controversial operations related to the events in Timișoara: the decision to transport 40 corpses to Bucharest in order to be cremated. The authorities wanted to wipe out the traces of the bloody repression and to avoid a chain reaction by the city dwellers at the sight of 40 funerary corteges. The corpses

Monday, 18 December 1989, the city was silent. The communist authorities were doing their best to wipe out the traces of the bloody repression. During the day, people walked quietly around the city. Many had relatives, friends or acquaintances shot dead or wounded the previous night. It was a working day, so that people went to work but did not effectively work. In fact, a large part of the city was on strike. A majority of the population could not believe what happened: they could not believe that the troops shot to kill, that many protesters were under arrest, that the traces of the bloody repression were quickly wiped out, and that the city was packed with army, militia and Securitate troops. Tuesday, 19 December 1989, was also an apparently normal workday. The city, however, was effectively on strike. People were scared of random shootings by the repressive forces. Almost everybody knew what happened during the night of 17/18 December. Relatives and friends were missing. Rumors about wounded revolutionaries killed in hospitals spread across the city. Again and again, many were asking themselves what to do next.

Wednesday, 20 December 1989, the workers in the main enterprises were at their workplaces but did not work. As an army officer recalls, after 0800 hours on the industrial platform of the city – located south of the Bega Canal, southeast of the Opera Square – small groups of workers were gathered in front of their workplaces.⁵² Slowly, a column was formed and the manifestants started their march towards the city center. Deliberately, the column took a longer way towards the Opera Square in order to reach the main enterprises in

of the killed protesters were loaded in Timișoara during the night of 18/19 December and arrived in Bucharest on 19 December at 1700 hours. The cremation lasted until the next day, 20 December, at 1000 hours. For a detailed account of the operation see Pitulescu, ed., *The Ministry of Internal Affairs in December 1989*, 114–20.

⁵² See the testimony of Gabriel Mitroi in *Timișoara: 16–22 Decembrie 1989*, 200–201.

the city and attract more people. As Nicolae Bădilescu remembers, the route they followed was: Calea Buziaşului, Heroes' Boulevard, Victor Babeş Boulevard, Romulus Street, Gheorghe Doja Street, Griviţa Roşie (Red Griviţa) Street, Alexandru Odobescu Street, 6 Martie (6th March) Boulevard, and 30 Decembrie (30th December) Boulevard. Thus, the column first crossed the city from east to west, south of the Bega Canal up to the Mary Square, and then headed north over the Canal towards the Orthodox Cathedral and the Opera Square.⁵³

When the column arrived at the entrance of the Opera Square the military troops did not fire. Instead, some fraternized with the demonstrators while others withdrew. As an army officer, Major Paul Vasile, remembers, the square was literally packed with people: "There were around 100,000 – 150,000 manifestants. They were making friendly gestures and were shouting 'Fără violență!' (No violence!), and 'Armata e cu noi!' (The army is with us!)." ⁵⁴ It was around 1230 hours on 20 December 1989 and the city was virtually in the hands of the protesters. A major goal of the revolutionaries, Ioan Lorin Fortuna recalls, was to make their message heard. Nevertheless, even the revolutionaries that entered in the Opera Square did not truly believe at that moment that the communist system in Romania would collapse. For instance, Fortuna recalls: "I was thinking that what we could hope for was the elimination of the dictator, followed by an interim government upon which pressures would have to be exercised to open towards democracy. At the time, I did not envisage and I did not dare to hope that one could obtain the total elimination of communism from the domestic political scene." ⁵⁵ The protesters occupied the balcony of the Opera House, which overlooks the Opera

⁵³ Milin, *Timișoara in revolution and after*, 97–98.

⁵⁴ Quoted in Codrescu, ed., *The Romanian army in the 1989 Revolution*, 53.

⁵⁵ See the confession of Ioan Lorin Fortuna in Milin, *Timișoara in revolution and after*, 106.

Square, and transformed it into a revolutionary tribune.⁵⁶ For a period of time, that day two balconies were opened. Apart from the Opera House's balcony, another group of revolutionaries occupied temporarily the balcony of the RCP County Council. Thus, there were in fact two "revolutionary" balconies: one at the Opera House and another at the RCP County Council. However, the balcony of the Opera House is better placed since it overlooks a large square, the Opera Square, and has a symbolic location in the front of the Orthodox Cathedral. In many respects, the revolutionary speeches delivered from that balcony kept alive the spirit of resistance in Timișoara for two long days, i.e. from 20 to 22 December 1989. From that balcony it was announced the creation of the Romanian Democratic Front (*Frontul Democrat Român* – FDR) shortly after 1300 hours on 20 December, as the first political organization of the opposition. It was also from that balcony that the names of Ion Iliescu and Corneliu Mănescu were mentioned in connection to the anti-Ceaușescu protests.⁵⁷ In the afternoon, in the building of the RCP County Council a meeting was held at about 1700 hours between the revolutionaries and Prime Minister Constatin Dăscălescu. The main request from the part of the revolutionaries was brief: Nicolae Ceaușescu to present his resignation and a new democratic government to be formed. Dăscălescu was also asked to speak to the crowd gathered in the Opera Square.⁵⁸ Dăscălescu, who was not in the position to offer a positive answer to such a request, refused to speak to the revolutionaries. Thus, the negotiations with the communist authorities reached a deadlock. Prime Minister Dăscălescu and his team of high rank officials flew back to Bucharest the same

⁵⁶ See the testimonies of Fortuna and Ioan Covaci in Milin, *Timișoara in revolution and after*, 105–107 and 108–109 respectively.

⁵⁷ See the testimonies of Fortuna and Bădilescu in Milin, *Timișoara in revolution and after*, 111–16 and 117–20 respectively.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 119.

evening.⁵⁹ Shortly after the discussions with the RCP representatives were called off, the group of protesters from the building of the RCP County Council was evacuated. Consequently, they joined the group that occupied the Opera House and the Opera Square became therefore the core of the Timișoara uprising.

The same day, Wednesday 20 December, Ceaușescu, who had just returned from an official visit to Iran – the presidential airplane had landed on the Bucharest-Otopeni airport at 1600 hours, delivered a televised speech at 1900 hours. One should be remembered that in the middle of such an acute crisis, Ceaușescu had decided to pay an official visit to Iran during the period 18–20 December, as scheduled before the events in Timișoara. Sources from the Ministry of Internal Affairs reveal that while in Teheran Ceaușescu was kept informed permanently about the unfolding of events at home.⁶⁰ In his speech, Ceaușescu stated among others:

On 16 and 17 December, under the pretext of hampering the completion of a legal judicial decision, some groups of hooligan elements have organized a series of manifestations and incidents by attacking official institutions and by looting a series of buildings, stores, public offices, and on 17 December they have intensified their activity against state and Party institutions, including some military units ... One can certainly state that those actions of terrorist nature have been organized and launched in close connection with reactionary, imperialistic, irredentist, chauvinistic circles and the intelligence services of different foreign countries ... The scope of these anti-national actions was to provoke disorder in order to destabilize the political and economic situation, to create the conditions for the territorial dismemberment of Romania, to destroy the independence and sovereignty of our socialist motherland ... It is not by chance that the radio stations in Budapest and other countries have launched during the unfolding of these anti-

⁵⁹ Pitulescu, ed., *The Ministry of Internal Affairs in December 1989*, 127.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 164.

national, terrorist actions a spurious campaign of discrediting and lies against our country.⁶¹

Ceaușescu also announced that a state of emergency was declared on the territory of the Timiș county. The radio-televised discourse of Ceaușescu could not mobilize the population anymore. From the night of 17/18 December on, the international media had picked the news of the bloody repression of the Timișoara protesters and spread it to the international and domestic audiences. People already knew what was happening in Timișoara and an overwhelming majority of the population sided with the anti-Ceaușescu protests. Nevertheless, the situation of the Timișoara protesters was critical since by that time the uprising did not spread to other major urban centers. A sole exception existed: the small town of Lugoj, situated some 60 km east of Timișoara, where protests by the population started on 20 December at 1800 hours.⁶²

Meanwhile, the group of revolutionaries that occupied the balcony of the Opera House was working at the political program of the RDF. Around midnight, the number of revolutionaries in the Opera Square was probably in the hundreds, as witness accounts indicate. Thursday, 21 December 1989, at approximately 0300 hours, the text of the FDR's Proclamation was finalized.⁶³ Nevertheless, some good news came after 0600 hours, when delegates from different large enterprises in Timișoara announced that the personnel already started to mobilize and they would march towards the Opera Square. At 0830 hours the

⁶¹ Reproduced in Aurel Perva and Carol Roman, *Misterele revoluției române: Revenire după ani* (The mysteries of the Romanian revolution: A come back after years) (Bucharest: Editura Carro, 1991), 38–39.

⁶² According to military sources, the protest in Lugoj was organized by persons coming from Timișoara. See Codrescu, ed., *The Romanian army in the 1989 Revolution*, 82.

⁶³ For the whole text of the FDR Proclamation see Pitulescu, ed., *The Ministry of Internal Affairs in December 1989*, 127–28.

Opera Square was again packed with people. More importantly, at that moment protests had already started in another major Romanian city: Arad, situated 50 km north of Timișoara. It is also highly relevant for the present reconstruction of events to notice the way in which the wave of protests traveled from the west to the east of the country. On 21 December 1989, unrest sparked in major cities (county capitals) as follows: Arad (0800 hours); Sibiu (0945 hours);⁶⁴ Tîrgu Mureș (1130 hours); Reșița (1200 hours); Bucharest (1240 hours); Brașov (1300 hours);⁶⁵ Cluj (1500 hours); and Alba Iulia (2230 hours).⁶⁶

Ceaușescu decided to organize a mass rally in Bucharest on 21 December 1989 at 1200 hours. Colonel Dumitru Dumitrașcu, the head of the Bucharest Municipal Inspectorate of the Ministry of Internal Affairs has provided some details on the way the mass rally was prepared. On 20 December, at 2330 hours, Dumitrașcu was summoned to the prime secretary of the Bucharest Party organization, Barbu Petrescu. Confidentially, Petrescu told him that Ceaușescu had just asked if a grand mass rally on the model of the August 1968 meeting could be organized in the Palace Square the next day, 21 December. Dumitrașcu has confessed that his answer was affirmative, although he knew very well that the population of Bucharest was exasperated by the miserable living conditions. Then, Petrescu phoned to Ceaușescu and confirmed that, as far as he was concerned, the meeting could be organized.⁶⁷ The mass rally was intended to

⁶⁴ On the events in Sibiu see Constantin Vasile, *Have we been the terrorists?!*, 16–56.

⁶⁵ For a brief account of the events in Brașov during the 21–22 December 1989 period see Marius Petrașcu et al., *Un pas spre libertate: Brașov, decembrie 1989* (A step towards liberty: Brașov, December 1989) (Brașov: Fundația “Sfântul Ioan,” n.d.), 80–85.

⁶⁶ Mioc, ed., *The revolution, void of mysteries*, 220.

⁶⁷ For Dumitrașcu’s declaration see Pitulescu, ed., *The Ministry of Internal Affairs in December 1989*, 165–66.

put the blame for the bloody events in Timișoara on the “hooligan elements” allegedly linked, as he had stated in his radio-televised address the previous evening, with “reactionary, imperialistic, irredentist, chauvinistic circles and the intelligence services of different foreign countries.” Furthermore, the rally was organized in the Palace Square, in an attempt, perhaps, to repeat the “balcony scene” of 21 August 1968, when Ceaușescu’s discourse electrified the audience. Thus, the meeting was prepared following the usual procedure. In the Bucharest enterprises the personnel was mobilized to attend the rally, the slogans were carefully prepared in advance and the security men were in place in order to hamper people leave prematurely the gathering.⁶⁸ However, some unusual banners were added to the ones utilized for such gatherings. For instance, on some banners one could read slogans such as: “Condamnăm cu fermitate trădătorii de țară” (We firmly condemn the traitors to our country) and “Să înceteze manifestările șoviniste, iredentiste ale cercurilor străine” (Stop the chauvinistic, irredentist acts by foreign circles).⁶⁹

Ceaușescu tried in many respects to reenact the scene of 21 August 1968. Such an assertion is also supported by the former head of the “Ștefan Gheorghiu” Party Academy, Dumitru Popescu. In an oral history interview, Popescu affirmed that on 21 December Ceaușescu believed that he could recreate the atmosphere of unconditional support for his person of that August 1968.⁷⁰ Indeed, in his discourse of 21 December 1989, Ceaușescu referred to the necessity to safeguard the national sovereignty and asked for “force and unity in defending Romania’s independence.”⁷¹ What people mobilized to participate to the meeting experienced, one can grasp from the

⁶⁸ Codrescu, ed., *The Romanian army in the 1989 Revolution*, 111.

⁶⁹ Pitulescu, ed., *The Ministry of Internal Affairs in December 1989*, 165–66.

⁷⁰ Dumitru Popescu, *Un fost lider comunist se destăinuie: Am fost și cioplitor de himere* (A former communist leader confesses: I was also a carver of chimeras) (Bucharest: Editura Expres, n.d.), 380.

⁷¹ Quoted in Tănase, *The miracle of the revolution*, 267.

testimony of Hermina Ştirbulescu. She recalls that at the design institute where she was working the senior employees tried to recuse themselves on different grounds in order to avoid going in the Palace Square. Since she was a junior employee, there was no way out: she had to participate to the mass rally. Usually, at such events people did their best to stay as little as possible. Therefore, they placed themselves at strategic points on the sides of the gathering and waited for a moment of negligence from the part of the watchmen. When the moment was right, they would leave quietly and go home. This was exactly what Ştirbulescu was trying to do. She placed herself in the last row and just behind her was the human chain of security men and, apathetically, was chewing a bagel waiting for the right moment to escape and go home. After a while, she looked back and was surprised to see that the watchmen had vanished. Shortly afterwards, a sudden noise was heard somewhere in the middle of the gathering and people started to yell. Then she felt that she could scarcely breathe: with profound consternation she saw a flock of people moving in waves towards her. From that moment on, her only thought was to escape from the square as quickly as she could, because she had an acute feeling that she was running for her life.⁷²

Military sources confirm that during the Bucharest meeting people from the crowd started to yell. According to some sources there were first women voices. (In the early 1990s, Nica Leon, a controversial character but nevertheless an opponent of the regime, claimed that it was he who provoked the first skirmish during Ceauşescu's speech.⁷³) Shouts of "Timişoara!" were also heard. Then, a small explosion occurred. Shortly afterwards, a large TV camera, belonging

⁷² Hermina Ştirbulescu, interview by author, 28 December 2002, Bucharest.

⁷³ On Nica Leon's claims see Popescu, *A former communist leader confesses*, 382. On Leon's anti-Ceauşescu activities see the account of Coen Stork, the former Dutch ambassador to Romania, in *Cel mai iubit dintre ambasadori: Coen Stork în dialog cu Gabriel Andreescu* (The most beloved of the ambassadors: Coen Stork in dialogue with Gabriel Andreescu) (Bucharest: Editura All), 63–64.

to the state television, fell with a loud noise.⁷⁴ Sources from the Ministry of Internal Affairs claim that, in addition to the already mentioned disturbances, a group of approximately 100 persons, gathered in the vicinity of the Bucharest Hotel, i.e. close to the north entrance to the Palace Square, started to sing “Awake thee, Romanian”!⁷⁵ The televised program was suspended immediately. Across Romania, people stared at the television screens. For many, it was unbelievable. For others, it was the moment they were dreaming of for so many years. A few minutes later, the televised transmission was resumed. To Ceaușescu’s stupefaction, the crowd yelled again and a few minutes later, panicked, the participants were trying to leave the place. Totally confused, Ceaușescu tried, from the balcony of the CC of the RCP, to calm down the people: he promised them a ridiculous raise in salaries, but nobody listened to him. The mass rally ended in chaos. Intended to support Ceaușescu’s rule, the meeting turned into an anti-Ceaușescu demonstration. The time was about 1250 hours on 21 December 1989. While leaving the balcony of the CC building, Ceaușescu convoked the Ministry of National Defense, General Vasile Milea; the head of the Securitate, General Iulian Vlad; and the Minister of Internal Affairs, Tudor Postelnicu. He told them that he decided to relocate the general headquarters to the CC building. According to a witness, Ceaușescu concluded: “We will defend the cause; we will take up arms to defend socialism, because we are waging a war more difficult than the war against Hitlerism. We are therefore at war and not in a state of emergency. The army, the internal affairs, and the Securitate must do their duty immediately.”⁷⁶

If one looks at a map of Bucharest, one can observe that the General Magheru Boulevard, continued by the Nicolae Bălcescu

⁷⁴ Codrescu, ed., *The Romanian army in the 1989 Revolution*, 111.

⁷⁵ Pitulescu, ed., *The Ministry of Internal Affairs in December 1989*, 168.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

Boulevard, is the major route on the north-south axis of the city. The two boulevards unite the Roman Square and the University Square, while the Palace Square is halfway on the route between the two, slightly to the west but very close. The building of the CC of the RCP overlooks the Palace Square, and the access from the Palace Square to the Bălcescu Boulevard is ensured by the Onești Street. That day of 21 December, after evacuating the Palace Square, some groups moved towards the Bălcescu Boulevard, which lies behind the building of the CC of the RCP. Once they reached the boulevard, the protesters regrouped in two main positions: in the Roman Square (*Piața Romană*) and the University Square (*Piața Universității*). It is also important to mention that, at the time, the major international hotel in Bucharest was the Intercontinental Hotel, which overlooks the University Square. This detail is important, because the Intercontinental Hotel in Bucharest usually hosted foreigners and therefore many protesters thought that by demonstrating in the front of that particular hotel news about their protest would be easily transmitted abroad. Also, one should note that the American Embassy in Bucharest is located on the Batiștei Street, just behind the Intercontinental Hotel, and consequently many revolutionaries thought that by demonstrating in the University Square the news about their protest would immediately reach the outside world. There were, therefore, important reasons for the part of the revolutionaries to carry out their protest in the University Square, in the very center of the capital city Bucharest.

Gathered in the University Square, demonstrators shouted anti-Ceaușescu slogans. Arrived at 1500 hours at the University Square metro station, painter Adrian Contici was amazed how crowded the platform was: lots of people, militia troops and Securitate agents. Militia troops and the Securitate agents were unusually placid, he thought. In the University Square, lots of people, many with candles in their hands, were shouting slogans such as: “Ieri în Timișoara, mâine în toată țara!” (Yesterday in Timișoara, tomorrow in the whole

country!); “Jos dictatura! (Down with the dictatorship!); “Jos comunismul!” (Down with communism!); “Libertate!” (Freedom!); and “Moarte tiranului!” (Death to the tyrant!).⁷⁷

It is also interesting to analyze the way in which people reacted when the first groups of protesters entered the University Square. Some preferred to rush home and barricaded themselves into their homes. For others, the fact that they shouted anti-Ceaușescu slogans acted as a sort of safety valve, as a technician from the Romlux Tîrgoviște enterprise told this author. The man had been sent in an official business trip to Bucharest that particular day of 21 December when was caught in the midst of the revolution. He joined the protest for a while and then, satisfied, rushed to the railway station in order to catch a convenient train back to Tîrgoviște. There were also people who joined the protest for a longer period of time. They stayed in the University Square until the dark fell and the shooting began. Some were arrested, while others were injured or killed.

As for the communist authorities, the first measure they took was to block the access towards the building of the CC of the RCP. At about 1400 hours, army units backed by armored vehicles were called to reinforce the already existing units in the area.⁷⁸ Like in Timișoara, the troops called to repress the manifestants comprised the army, the militia, the riot police and the Securitate. Also, in the evening, at the Intercontinental Hotel, six fire engines were brought to back the riot police. The first incident, however, occurred at 1630 – 1645 hours, when a military truck hit a group of protesters at the Dalles Hall, some tens of meters away from the Intercontinental Hotel. According to the official data 23 civilians and 4 riot police troops were hit: 7 protesters died and 7 were severely injured. A member of the riot police troops was also injured.⁷⁹ At 2020 hours the fire engines tried

⁷⁷ For Contici's complete story see Perva and Roman, *The mysteries of the Romanian revolution*, 40–45.

⁷⁸ Pitulescu, ed., *The Ministry of Internal Affairs in December 1989*, 169.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 171–73.

in vain to disperse the demonstrators. Tear gas grenades were also launched. At about 2230 hours the protesters erected a barricade across the Bălcescu Boulevard. The barricade was made of tables from the nearby Dunărea (Danube) Restaurant, garbage bins, tubes confiscated from the fire engines and, finally, with some trucks appropriated “through revolutionary methods,” as Tănase puts it.⁸⁰ An officer recalls that there were two trucks and two vans or Aro four-wheel drive vehicles.⁸¹ The barricade, which was subsequently set on fire by the revolutionaries, was only dismantled with the help of the tanks towards 2330 hours on 21 December.⁸²

The shooting lasted until 0300 hours on 22 December. It is, however, difficult to provide with some precision the hour when the first shots meant to kill were fired. Tănase, who was at the barricade nearby the Intercontinental Hotel, recalls that at 2020 on 21 December the troops already fired into the air. Then, after 2300 hours the situation became grave. Corroborating different sources, it may be argued that a bloody repression started at about 2300 hours on 21 December and lasted until 0300 hours on 22 December.⁸³ After 0300 hours, the authorities tried to wipe out the traces of the repression. The pavement was washed, the debris collected. As for the extent of the repression in Bucharest, sources from the Ministry of Internal Affairs have provided the following figures: 1,245 persons were arrested, 462 wounded, and 50 killed on 21 December 1989.⁸⁴

The early morning of 22 December seemed rather calm. The main streets of Bucharest however, were blocked by army, militia and Securitate troops. In spite of the massive presence of the troops,

⁸⁰ Tănase, “Bloody solstice in Bucharest,” 10–11.

⁸¹ Testimony of Lieutenant Dorel Nae quoted in Pitulescu, ed., *The Ministry of Internal Affairs in December 1989*, 174.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Tănase, “Bloody solstice in Bucharest,” 14–15. See also Codrescu, ed., *The Romanian army in the 1989 Revolution*, 112.

⁸⁴ Pitulescu, ed., *The Ministry of Internal Affairs in December 1989*, 175.

beginning with 0900 hours large crowds poured into the streets. Surprisingly, beginning with 1045 hours the army troops began to withdraw to their garrisons. Then, at 1059 hours, the national radio-television announced that a presidential decree, which instated a state of emergency on the whole territory of Romania, was issued. Immediately after the decree was read, the following announcement was made: "The Minister of National Defense turned traitor to Romania's independence and sovereignty and, being aware that his actions have been revealed, he committed suicide. We appeal to all those who love their country and people to act most firmly against any traitor."⁸⁵ According to the final report of the senatorial commission which carried out an inquiry on the death of General-colonel Vasile Milea, Minister of National Defense, the general committed suicide between 0925 and 0935 hours on 22 December.⁸⁶ Nevertheless, in spite of the post-1989 official statements, rumors concerning Milea's death persist.⁸⁷ Milea's replacement, General-lieutenant Victor Stănculescu, ordered the withdrawal of the army units to their barracks at about 1045 hours.⁸⁸

Meanwhile, large crowds were moving towards downtown. Columns of workers came from the large industrial platforms of Bucharest and moved slowly towards the city center. At the Grivița Heavy Machinery enterprise, the director ordered that the gates be welded in order to hamper the workers leave the factory and join the revolution.⁸⁹ In some places, the workers stormed the gates. In other

⁸⁵ Codrescu, ed., *The Romanian army in the 1989 Revolution*, 119.

⁸⁶ The conclusions of the report were presented in November 1996. For more on the suicide of minister Milea, see Codrescu, ed., *The Romanian army in the 1989 Revolution*, 123–30.

⁸⁷ See the testimony of General Iulian Vlad, the former head of the Securitate in *ibid.*, 128.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁸⁹ Personal communication to the author by workers at the Grivița Heavy Machinery enterprise.

places, the leadership joined the columns. Nothing hampered the columns in their march towards downtown: neither riot police barriers, nor armored vehicles or fire engines. From 1100 hours onwards, the army units increasingly fraternized with the revolutionaries. Once arrived in the Palace Square the crowds assaulted the building of the CC of the RCP. The time was approximately 1200 hours. Again, not one of the security guards attempted at stopping the crowds and not a single shot was fired at the protesters. Confused and frightened, the supreme leader of the RCP – who had spent the night inside the CC of RCP building accompanied by his wife and ministers Milea, Vlad and Postelnicu – flew by helicopter from the upper platform of CC building.⁹⁰ The moment when Ceaușescu and his wife, Elena, flew by helicopter from the upper platform of the building of the CC of the RCP was the moment when the communist regime collapsed – suddenly, completely and unbelievably.⁹¹ It was 22 December 1989 and the time was 1208 hours.⁹²

⁹⁰ Perva and Roman, *The mysteries of the Romanian revolution*, 46–49.

⁹¹ The same day, 22 December, the Ceaușescus were arrested. Three days later, on December 25, after a badly staged trial, Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu were executed by a firing squad in the city of Tîrgoviște, 74 km. north of Bucharest. For an early account of the events, see Dorian Marcu, *Moartea Ceaușescilor: Revelații și documente istorice* (Death of the Ceaușescus: Revelations and historical documents) (Bucharest: Editura Excelsior, 1991), esp. 92–123. The most documented work on the capture, trial and execution of the Ceaușescu couple is Grigore Cartianu, *Sfârșitul Ceaușescilor: Să mori împușcat ca un animal sălbatic* (The end of the Ceaușescus: To die shot at as a wild animal) (Bucharest: Editura Adevărul Holding, 2010).

⁹² Urdăreanu, *1989 – Witness and participant*, 115.

Chapter 3

STRUCTURAL FACTORS

This chapter concentrates on the influence of the structural factors, i.e. economic failure and ideological decay on the collapse of the communist dictatorship in Romania. As shown in Chapter 1, the communist dictatorships in Bulgaria and Romania have been termed as modernizing-nationalizing dictatorships, thus stressing the fact that the communist power elites in both countries eventually understood the importance of economic development *and* nation-building as means of legitimizing their power. At the same time, when addressing the issue of economic failure, the Romanian case seems to illustrate best the structural flaws of state socialism. Among the communist countries that experienced a regime change in 1989, Romania was the one in which the economic conditions were the most difficult. Nevertheless, in spite of the conspicuous failure of the regime to provide for its population Romania was the last country to exit from communism in 1989. Thus, one has to address also the intricate problem of the popular perceptions of the regime and assess – in the light of the historical legacies related to fundamental issues such as *economic backwardness* and *national identity* – what factors delayed the development of social protest in Ceaușescu's Romania.

Economic Failure

This chapter discusses the economic performance of the communist regime in Romania over the period 1945–1989 in order to illustrate the relationship between the severe economic crisis in the 1980s and the growing potential for social protest. However, it should be stressed once again that although Romania faced the most severe crisis among the six countries that experienced a regime change in 1989, it was the last to exit from communism that year. In order to explain such a paradoxical situation, one has to address the mechanism of rising expectations and setbacks that characterized the Ceaușescu period. Thus, apart from a thorough examination of the industrialization process initiated by the regime, one has to analyze the main aspects of the civilizing process under state socialism in Romania such as: urbanization and housing, spread of education and sanitation, transportation and increased mobility by the population etc. during the 1960s and 1970s. The crisis of the 1980s paved in many respects the way for the bloody revolution of 1989, and therefore the causes and immediate effects of the economic crisis are critically assessed in order to explain the relationship between the miseries of everyday life and the high potential for protest of a majority of the population in the late 1980s.

Major policy decisions regarding the economic development and implicitly the “socialist modernization” of the country under communist rule were made in accordance with the external constraints and the political goals of the local power elite. Starting from this assertion, the period 1945–1989 can be divided into four distinct periods that represent different stages in the complicated relationship between politics and economics under communist rule in Romania. These four periods are defined as follows: (1) humble imitation of the Soviet model, 1945–1956; (2) development and emancipation, 1956–1964; (3) closely watched relaxation, 1964–1977; and (4) crisis

and decline, 1977–1989. Although it is not the scope of this book to provide an economic history of communist Romania, there are some issues that deserve a thorough investigation in order to illustrate the relationship between the economic decline and the final demise of Romanian communism. Of these issues, two deserve further examination due to their direct influence upon the nature, unfolding and outcome of the 1989 revolution in Romania.

A first issue is that of the achievements of the so-called “golden epoch” of Romanian communism, an epoch that determined a sharp rise in the expectations of an overwhelming majority of the population with regard to their personal development as well as to that of the Romanian society in general. Many authors conventionally place that period between 1964 and 1971, i.e. from the issuance of the Declaration of April 1964 to the issuance of the Theses of July 1971. Nevertheless, it is this author’s opinion that one should consider the period 1964–1977, i.e. the period of time spanning from the issuance of the Declaration of April 1964 to the sparking of the strike organized on 2–3 August 1977 by the miners in the Jiu Valley basin. The main reason for adopting a longer time interval is to stress the importance of two events that have to do with the intricate relationship between politics and economics in communist Romania. In 1964, the bold strategy of political survival – based on independence from Moscow and extensive industrialization – devised by Gheorghiu-Dej and his men took a definite form. The year 1977 is important because two major events that took place that year signaled that the “tacit deal” between the Ceaușescu regime and the Romanian society at large was coming to an end. Chronologically, the first event was the initiation of the Goma Human Rights Movement. Initiated by writer Paul Goma, and known since as the Goma Movement, it lasted three months (February–April 1977) and was the most articulated large-scale dissident action in communist Romania. The second major event was the above mentioned strike organized by the Jiu Valley miners, which due to its characteristics – it was a round-the-clock, non-violent, occupation strike – constituted

the first mature working class protest in communist Romania and was perceived as such by the regime. Another event, both tragic and unexpected, is usually neglected by conventional analyses of Romanian communism: the terrible earthquake of 4 March 1977. Nevertheless, that particular earthquake had a great impact on Romania's economic performance and contributed decisively to the economic downturn of the late 1970s and the early 1980s.

A second issue that deserves thorough examination is that of the severe economic crisis of the period 1981–1989. The food shortages and the power cuts of the 1980s were by no means the only causes of the bloody revolution in Romania. At the same time, the everyday miseries were among the causes of the popular revolt that sparked the 1989 revolution in this country. Thus, in order to identify the causes of the economic downturn in the late 1970s one has to analyze the economic policy of the Ceaușescu regime. In a command economy, the central planner decides upon the separation of national income into accumulation and consumption. Therefore, the crucial decision about the size of accumulation is political. During the 1980s, the developmental pattern imposed by the Ceaușescu regime continued to favor primary and secondary sectors with a strong emphasis on coal mining as well as on steel, heavy machinery and petrochemical industries. These sectors however were unable to produce competitive goods for export, especially for the Western markets. Apart from the fact that these sectors were unable to compete on the international markets, their functioning required a high level of energy consumption that led to an endemic energy crisis in industry. On top of this, Ceaușescu became obsessed with paying back the external debt of the country and consequently imposed a heavy burden on agriculture, as one of the few producers of exportable goods. Simply put, the erroneous economic strategy devised by the regime in the late 1960s was pursued unabatedly, in spite of unfavorable international and domestic conjunctures. Throughout the 1980s, instead of introducing economic reforms the regime imposed harsh rationing measures that affected primarily the

population. These measures concentrated on the rationing of energy consumption (e.g. power supply for household use, gasoline for private cars etc.), of food supplies (food rationing was introduced in the early 1980s), and of basic consumer goods (e.g. soap, toothpaste, detergents etc.). This chapter is also concerned with the way in which by the late 1980s the mistaken economic policy of the Ceaușescu regime forced a large majority of the population to think in terms of sheer biological survival. As shown below, such an economic strategy led to both absolute and relative deprivation, which affected a great majority of the population and contributed significantly to the final demise of the Romanian communist regime.

A truly controversial issue is that of the modernizing aspects of the communist dictatorship in Romania. Actually, can one speak of a “civilizing process” under communism? As Norbert Elias has brilliantly shown in his path-breaking work, such a process has to do with the “social quality of people, their housing, their manners, their speech, their clothing.” At the same time, the concept of “civilization” – Elias further noted – refers to:

A wide variety of facts: to the level of technology, to the type of manners, to the development of scientific knowledge, to religious ideas and customs. It can refer to the type of dwelling or the manner in which men and women live together, to the form of judicial punishment, or to the way in which food is prepared. . . . But when one examines what the general function of the concept of civilization really is, and what common quality leads all these various human attitudes and activities to be described as civilized, one starts with a very simple discovery: this concept expresses the self-consciousness of the West. One could even say: the national consciousness. It sums up everything in which Western society of the last two or three centuries believes itself superior to earlier societies or ‘more primitive’ contemporary ones.¹

¹ Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations* (London: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 5, 6.

As far as communist Romania is concerned, the scope of this author is more limited. Thus, this section of the book addresses the changes in the “social quality of people” – as compared with the more “civilized” Western Europe – during the four periods under scrutiny, i.e. 1945–1956; 1956–1964; 1964–1977; and 1977–1989. In terms of civilizational aspects, at the turn of the 19th century the comparison between Romania and the West meant a comparison between different types of society, i.e. between the quasi-Oriental and the Western type of society. However, from 1848 onwards a small but committed Westernizing elite educated mainly in Paris devised and carried out a project of nation-building and modernization from above that in the end proved to be successful. With regard to the creation of the modern Romanian state, the main chronological landmarks are the years 1859, 1866 and 1877. All in all, after its creation, the Romanian state went through a process of modernization through “cognitive dissonance.” After the creation of Greater Romania in the aftermath of World War I and throughout the interwar period, the social structure of the country remained deeply polarized. While the upper strata of the population living in the few large urban centers enjoyed Western-style amenities, the large, poverty-stricken and poorly integrated peasant population lived very much alike their distant ancestors did. Although economy picked up by the end of the 1930s, the industrialization process – that was conducted mainly from above, as well as the agrarian reforms changed little the socio-economic landscape. The country remained predominantly agrarian, with over three-quarters of the population living in the rural areas. Thus, according to the 1930 census, 78.2 percent of Romania’s population was employed in agriculture as compared with only 7.2 percent employed in industry. As for the rural-urban distribution of the population, in 1930 78.6 percent of the total population lived in rural areas, while only 21.4 percent lived in

urban areas. In 1948, 76.6 percent of the total population still lived in rural areas, while 23.4 percent lived in urban areas.²

After the communist takeover, the project of sustained modernization from above – devised by the Romanian political elite in the second half of the 19th century and continued during the interwar period – became part and parcel of the “revolution from above” launched by the newly established regime. Thus, as a result of the program of extensive industrialization and urbanization carried out under the communist rule – with terrible social costs though – by the end of the 1980s the distinction between Romania and the West operated within one type of society, i.e. the Western one. In terms of economic development, the difference between the developed countries of the First World and the communist countries of the Second World was insignificant compared to the wide gap that separated the Second World from the underdeveloped countries of the Third World.

To be sure, the two systems did not truly converge. Analysts of the Soviet system, such as Bertram Wolfe, provided valuable critical comments on the convergence theory.³ As far as this author is concerned, the difference – by no means negligible – between the two systems that characterized the First and respectively Second world was primarily civilizational. As compared to their Western counterparts, the communist societies developed a cultural syndrome best defined by the Polish sociologist Piotr Sztompka as “civilizational incompetence.” Thus, Sztompka argues that a developed society operates on the basis of a “less obvious, underlying cultural resource” called “civilizational competence,” which can be defined as: “A

² See Dinu C. Giurescu, *Illustrated History*, 499, as well as the data provided in Table 4 in Shafir, *Romania – Politics, Economics and Society*, 47.

³ Bertram D. Wolfe, “The Convergence Theory in Historical Perspective,” in idem, *An Ideology in Power: Reflections on the Russian Revolution* (New York: Stein and Day, 1970), 393–94.

complex set of rules, norms, and values, habits and reflexes, codes and matrixes, blueprints and formats – the skillful and semi-automatic mastering of which is a prerequisite for participation in a modern civilization.” The same author identifies four sub-categories of civilizational competence: (1) enterprise culture; (2) civic culture; (3) discursive culture; and (4) everyday culture.⁴ True, the syndrome of “civilizational incompetence” proved to be more enduring in Southeast Europe than in Central Europe, and the tortuous transition to democracy in post-1989 Romania perfectly illustrates such an assertion. However, the evolution of the former communist societies in ECE demonstrated that the syndrome of “civilizational incompetence” was curable – although in some cases the convalescence took more than a decade – exactly because, as mentioned above, the difference operated within a sole category: the Western-type of society.

When discussing the “civilizing” trends under communism, an aspect of prime significance is that of urbanization and spread of urban culture among the population of the country. Following Gyorgy Enyedi, urbanization can be defined as:

The spatial reorganization of society by which, first, the geographical distribution of the population of a given country changes and (at least in the first stages of modern urbanization) gradually concentrates in cities and urban agglomerations; and, second, the urban life style, urban social structure and technology diffuse into the countryside, so that and urban/rural continuum (or a unified settlement system) replaces the earlier sharp urban/rural dichotomy.⁵

⁴ Piotr Sztompka, “Civilizational Incompetence: The Trap of Post-Communist Societies,” *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* (April 1993), 88–89.

⁵ Gyorgy Enyedi, “Urbanization under Socialism,” in Gregory Andrusz, Michael Harloe and Ivan Szelenyi, eds., *Cities after Socialism: Urban and Regional Change and Conflict in Post-Socialist Societies* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 101.

As Per Ronnås argues, there exist three basic approaches to urbanization, which are not mutually exclusive: (1) habitational, focusing on the mode of living; (2) industrial, focusing on industrial structure; and (3) social and cultural, focusing on cultural traits, habits and social characteristics.⁶ The present chapter analyzes the process of urbanization and spread of urban culture in communist Romania for each of the periods under scrutiny, i.e. 1945–56; 1956–64; 1964–77 and 1977–89 by taking into consideration the three approaches mentioned above, i.e. habitational, industrial, and socio-cultural. By adopting such a perspective, one can understand better why the epoch when the communist regime paid more attention to the habitational and socio-cultural aspects of urban life, i.e. 1964–1977 is identified by a majority of the population as the “golden age” of Romanian communism – a period that still has a unique place in folk memory. The issue of path dependency deserves further examination especially with regard to the strategies employed by the Romanian ruling elites in order to overcome backwardness and catch-up with the West from the mid-19th century onwards. Consequently, the following section addresses the main characteristics of the process of modernization carried out by the Romanian ruling elites during the period 1859–1945, i.e. from the coming into existence of the Romanian state and up to the moment of communist takeover.

⁶ Per Ronnås, *Urbanization in Romania: A Geography of Social and Economic Change since Independence* (Stockholm: The Economic Research Institute, Stockholm School of Economics, 1984), 5.

Background information

Economic development in Romania, 1859–1945

When the principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia united in 1859 the country that emerged, the United Principalities of Romania, was “eminently agrarian” as the conservative Nicolae Șuțu put it. Still under the suzerainty of the Ottoman Porte, the country, which would soon become the Kingdom of Romania, had to struggle for its independence and modernize rapidly. Liberal intellectuals such as Petre S. Aurelian and Ion Ghica were staunch supporters of a rapid industrialization of the country, stating that industrial development was “a guarantee of independence.” Ion Ghica went even further and argued that “a nation without industry cannot be considered civilized.”⁷ The way in which modernity emerged in the “suburbs of Europe” however was different from the experience of the West. As Andrew C. Janos has noted in his path-breaking work on Hungary:

Modern state took shape before the modern economy; it came into being not as a product, but as a potential instrument of social change. . . . Attitudes are not changed by exposure to the factory or the marketplace, but by distorted images of modern life, disseminated through various networks of communication, above all through the modern educational system which, like the modern state, arises not in response to social exigencies, but in anticipation of them. . . . What emerges thus is not a western-style *Gesellschaft*, but a fusion between the patterns of a *Gemeinschaft* and a *Gesellschaft*, with elements of the former predominating.⁸

The above statement is all the more appropriate for the case of Romania. In spite of the considerable efforts of modernizing elites,

⁷ Quoted in Vlad Georgescu, *The Romanians: A History* (London: I. B. Tauris & Co, 1991), 184.

⁸ Andrew C. Janos, *The Politics of Backwardness in Hungary, 1825–1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 314.

at the beginning of the twentieth century the Balkans remained “relatively untouched” by the Industrial Revolution and Romania was no exception.⁹ Actually, at the outbreak of World War I, as historian Vlad Georgescu put it, the country still lacked “many of the structures that define a modern society.”¹⁰ Indeed, in the Old Kingdom industrial progress was insignificant until independence.¹¹ In terms of economic development, between 1859 and 1877 the most important achievements were made in the petroleum industry and construction of railways. Actually, 62.2 percent of the big industry enterprises existing in 1901–1902 were established after 1886, when the Romanian government enforced protectionist legislation. In absolute numbers, from a total of 625 enterprises active in 1901, 236 were established before 1886; 167 were established during the period 1886–1892; and 222 were established between 1893 and 1901.¹² Nevertheless, one has to explain what “big industry” meant in the case of pre-World War I Romania. As defined by the Industrial Survey of 1901–1902, “big industry” (manufacturing industry) was characterized by three elements: (1) the use of mechanical force for running the machines; (2) a minimum amount of capital of 10,000 lei invested in fixed assets; and (3) a minimum

⁹ According to Peter N. Stearns and Herrick Chapman, major changes in terms of industrialization occurred in Britain between 1780 and 1850, while France and Belgium began a similar process around 1820. To its part, Germany began to industrialize in the 1840s, Sweden around 1850, Italy, Austria and northern Spain about 1870 and Russia in the 1890s. Only the Balkans were “relatively untouched” by the Industrial Revolution at the beginning of the twentieth century. See Peter N. Stearns and Herrick Chapman, *European Society in Upheaval: Social History Since 1750* (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 98–99.

¹⁰ Georgescu, *The Romanians*, 188.

¹¹ Ronnäs, *Urbanization in Romania*, 112.

¹² Gheorghe Iacob and Luminița Iacob, *Modernizare – Europeanism: România de la Cuza-Vodă la Carol al II-lea* (Modernization – Europeanism: Romania from Prince Cuza to Carol II) vol. I (Iași: Al. I. Cuza University Press, 1995), 88.

number of five employees. Until 1914, big industry utilized 75 percent of the total horsepower used in industry and represented 25 percent of the total number of employees; at the same time, it represented only 1.0 percent of the industry of Romania. Petroleum industry was one of the industries that experienced a rapid growth after 1857. The oil production increased from 200 tons in 1857 to 16,000 tons in 1880, 247,000 tons in 1900 and to 1,848,000 tons in 1913.¹³ Furthermore, due to the concentration of the petroleum industry in the Prahova Valley, this area became the most industrialized area of the Old Kingdom in the pre-1914 period.

According to the Industrial Survey of 1901–1902, the food-processing industry was the most important branch of the manufacturing industry with 26.2 percent of the total number of employees. In the second place was the metal working industry, with 19.4 percent of the total number of employees, followed by the wood industry with 16.6 percent, and the chemical industry, which employed only 8.5 percent of the total number of personnel. In terms of number of employees, other relatively important industries were textiles (5.9 percent of the total number of employees); printing (4.9 percent of the total); clothing (4.2 percent of the total); and paper (3.9 percent). To sum up, as Ronnås perceptively puts it, “the smallness of the manufacturing industry and the branch structure, with a large share of flour mills, reflects that at the turn of the century industry in the Old Kingdom was still in an incipient phase.”¹⁴ Until the 1918 unification with the Old Kingdom, industrial development in Transylvania was linked to the natural resources of the province (iron ore and coal). The most significant resources of coal were located in the Jiu Valley region; in 1913, from a total production of 2.5 million tons of coal 2.3 million were extracted from the Jiu Valley mines.¹⁵

¹³ Ibid., 91–92, 106.

¹⁴ Ronnås, *Urbanization in Romania*, 113.

¹⁵ Ibid., 114.

Metallurgical industry was concentrated in the cities of Reșița and Hunedoara, while Arad, Cluj, and Timișoara were the most relevant manufacturing centers. As a Western scholar aptly observed, Romania was a “backward traditional state with a large proportion of her resources locked up in a primitive and inefficient agrarian system.”¹⁶ To sum up, when World War I broke out Romania was still an agrarian state with a severe peasant problem.

The economic difficulties that immediately followed World War I were surpassed only in 1923–1924. The total number of workers employed in industry increased from 133,690 in 1915, to 176,879 in 1929.¹⁷ At the same time, the timid economic development of the 1920s was mostly reflected by the petroleum industry, which advanced at the most rapid pace. Compared to the pre-1914 period, the textiles, metallurgical and wood industries replaced the food processing industry in terms of personnel. In 1932, in absolute numbers the situation was the following: in the textiles industry were involved 38,074 persons (25 percent of the total number of personnel employed in industry); in the metallurgical industry were involved 26,083 persons (17 percent of the total); and in the wood industry were involved 24,056 persons (15.8 percent of the total). The trend was maintained over the entire period: in 1938, in the textiles industry were employed 74,077 persons (25.6 percent of the total); in metallurgy were employed 51,321 persons (17.7 percent of the total); and in the wood industry were employed 43,326 persons (15 percent of the total).¹⁸

¹⁶ See Derek Aldcroft, “Introduction” to David Turnock, *The Romanian Economy in the Twentieth Century* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), viii.

¹⁷ See Mircea Mușat and Ion Ardeleanu, *România după Marea Unire, 1918–1933* (Romania after the Great Union, 1918–1933) vol. II (Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1986), 356.

¹⁸ Iacob and Iacob, *Romania from Prince Cuza to Carol II*, 94–95.

The most industrialized areas of the country were the Prahova Valley (petroleum industry) and the Jiu Valley (coal mining), while Hunedoara and Reșița remained the main metallurgical centers. As for the manufacturing industry, the main centers of Greater Romania were the cities of Bucharest, Timișoara, Arad, Cluj, Brașov, and Iași. It should be stressed however that the secondary industries concentrated to cities and towns, to the disadvantage of non-agricultural activities in rural areas, which entered a vicious circle of underdevelopment.¹⁹ Furthermore, the censuses of 1901 and 1930 indicate the concentration of industrial activity mainly to the Ilfov and Prahova counties. As a whole, a thorough look to the interwar period indicates that Bucharest and the neighboring areas – primarily the Ilfov and Prahova counties – became more attractive for the big industry. Such a situation can be explained by considering the effects of the world depression of the 1930s, which affected to a greater extent the coal mining and metallurgical industry than oil industry. Nevertheless, one should not neglect vested political interests, i.e. the relationships between industrialists and political decision-makers in Bucharest, which made such areas more interesting for investors.²⁰

At the same time, the concentration of industry and commerce in the areas mentioned above illustrates the uneven level of industrialization of Greater Romania. In fact, in spite of some undeniable achievements, Romania was by no means a modern industrial state. As stated in a World Bank analysis of the Romanian economy published in the late 1970s, by the end of the interwar period “the Romanian economy remained a peripheral appendage of industrial Western Europe, supplying agricultural products and mineral and energy resources.”²¹ Henry L. Roberts, a keen observer

¹⁹ Ronnäs, *Urbanization in Romania*, 125.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 120.

²¹ Andreas C. Tsantis and Roy Pepper, eds., *Romania: The Industrialization of an Agrarian Economy Under Socialist Planning* (Washington D. C.: The World Bank, 1979), 23–24.

of the Romanian society in the 1940s, supports a similar idea. Roberts emphasizes the lack of integration of the industry with the older sectors of economy and argues that the slow development of the tertiary industries (related to marketing, distributing and selling) made the difference between the Romanian economy and the advanced economies of Western Europe:

There is an impression of disparateness throughout Rumania. In Bucharest one is startled by the abrupt transitions from modernity to backwardness. The oil wells and refineries at Ploiești spring out of a peasant landscape. Discussions on Rumanian industry revolve not around branches of industry but around specific large enterprises Reșița, Malaxa, I.A.R.—isolated spots in the economy. In both Rumanian agriculture and industry there is lacking a “middle ground,” a diversified, intensive peasant farming and the complex of intermediate industrial activities.²²

Actually, in terms of industrial production the interwar Romanian economy still relied on pockets of industrialization and significant industrial branches were still to be fully established. However, a full-scale industrialization strategy based on a free market approach was not implemented in Romania due to the beginning of World War II. War once terminated, the communist takeover followed shortly and led to a complete change in terms of political, economic, social and cultural policies. The following sections address the issues of economic development and overall modernization in communist Romania during the four epochs mentioned above, i.e. 1945–56; 1956–64; 1964–77; and 1977–89.

²² Henry L. Roberts, *Rumania: Political Problems of an Agrarian State* (n.p.: Archon Books, 1969), 336–37.

Humble imitation of the Soviet model, 1945–1956

One should clarify from the outset the issue of the abbreviations used in this book to denominate the communist party in Romania. Thus, during the period 1948–1965, the official name of the communist party in Romania was *Partidul Muncitoresc Român* – PMR (Romanian Workers Party – RWP). From 1965 to 1989, the official name was *Partidul Comunist Român* – PCR (Romanian Communist Party – RCP). Throughout this book, the two terms, i.e. RWP and RCP, are used in accordance with the period discussed and are not interchangeable. The term RWP/RCP has been used when patterns of continuity between the two periods, i.e. 1948–1965 and 1965–1989 needed to be stressed. Also, the abbreviation RCP is used for the period spanning from the establishment of the party in 1921 to the year 1948.

Having said this, let us turn to the issue of economic development and patterns of modernization under communist rule in Romania. The Romanian communists did not come to power with a precise economic and social agenda. During the period 1945–1956, the small group of local communist militants brought to power by the Red Army managed to maintain its position by displaying total loyalty towards Moscow and humbly emulating the Soviet model. This should be kept in mind when examining the strategy of economic development adopted by the Romanian communists in the aftermath of their coming to power. In fact, the local communists brought to power by the Soviets in the aftermath of World War II were rather unprepared to govern and had an unsophisticated vision of politics. The only chance of such a power elite to stay in power was to be subservient to Stalin and follow the Soviet model. To the extent that Romanian communists thought of an economic strategy of their own – and they had not much time to do so until the late 1950s – they linked economic development with the total transformation of the existing market economy into one following closely the Soviet model.

During this period, an issue of paramount importance for Gheorghiu-Dej and his men was to legitimize themselves in the eyes of Moscow, and not in the eyes of the population.²³

In terms of economic strategy, the newly established communist regime acted resolutely for a rapid transformation of the economic system of the country into a “command economy” on the Soviet model.²⁴ Nevertheless, one should note that the economic performance of Romania was deeply affected by the burden of war reparations, and by two years of severe draught and subsequent famine, i.e. 1946 and 1947. The amount of war reparations was officially fixed by the armistice agreement to \$ 300 million to be paid in kind at the 1938 prices. Moreover, \$ 508 million were to be paid additionally as a compensation for the goods appropriated by

²³ Concerning the concept of legitimacy, the present analysis employs James S. Coleman’s definition: “Legitimacy is simply the right to carry out certain authoritative actions and have them obeyed. It rests on a consensus of those actors in a society relevant to the continued exercise of authority – which may be the population as a whole or only certain parts of it.” See James S. Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1990), 470.

²⁴ With regard to economic Stalinism or Stalin’s model of “command economy,” this author follows Moshe Lewin who identified the following main features of a “command economy:” “(1) a high degree of centralization of economic decision making and planning; (2) comprehensive character of planning; (3) preference for physical units as instruments in accounting; (4) the use of ‘material balances’ for obtaining internal consistency of the plans; (5) a centralized administration for material supplies, which operated as a rationing system; (6) the imperative and detailed character of plans; (7) a hierarchically organized administration within factories; (8) the relegation of market categories and mechanisms to a secondary role, mainly to the sphere, albeit important, of personal consumption and to labor; and (9) coercion by the state, as direct organizer of the economy with its ubiquitous controls and etatization not only of the economy but of the other spheres of life as well.” Moshe Lewin, *Political Undercurrents in Soviet Economic Debates: From Bukharin to the Modern Reformers* (London: Pluto Press, 1975), 113–14.

Romania during the 1918–1940 period of rule over the territories of Bessarabia and Bukovina. Apart from this, the Soviet Union engaged in the exploitation of the natural resources of the country by the means of sixteen joint Soviet-Romanian companies, established after 1945, called Sovroms. Sovrompetrol, for instance, exported as much as two thirds of Romania's oil production to the Soviet Union. Other similar joint ventures were: Sovromtransport (transport sector, established in 1945); Tars (air transport, 1945); Sovrombanc (banking, 1945); Sovromlemn (timber, 1946); Sovromchim (chemical industry, 1948); Sovromtractor (tractors, 1948); Sovromgaz (natural gas, 1949); Sovromconstrucții (construction sector, 1949); Sovromasigurări (insurance sector, 1949); Sovromutilaj (oilfield equipment, 1952); Sovromnaval (ship building, 1952); and Sovromcuart (uranium exploitation, 1952). Of the sixteen Sovroms, nine were established in industry, two in the transport sector and one in each of the following sectors: construction, banking, insurance, uranium exploitation and film production.²⁵

After the forced abdication of King Michael I on 30 December 1947, the Assembly of Deputies passed the very same day a law (No. 363), which proclaimed the founding of the People's Republic of Romania. As far as the so-called "socialist transformation of economy" is concerned, a major event was the passing on 11 June 1948 of the law on the nationalization of large private businesses. This affected industrial, mining and transport companies, as well as banks and insurance companies. Subsequently, during the period November 1948 – April 1950 further steps were taken to nationalize smaller

²⁵ See Ronnås, *Urbanization in Romania*, 283 and Turnock, *The Romanian Economy*, 157. For a detailed analysis of the Sovrom phenomenon and its consequences for the Romanian economy see Florian Banu, *Asalt asupra economiei României – de la Solagra la SOVROM, 1936–1956* (Assault on Romania's economy: From Solagra to SOVROM, 1936–1956) (Bucharest: Editura Nemira, 2004), 123–79.

businesses and a segment of the urban housing sector.²⁶ Furthermore, the regime mobilized ample private financial resources through the monetary reform of 28 January 1952, by which only small amounts of money were exchanged at a convenient rate of 1 new *leu* for 20 old *lei*. For large amounts of cash it was offered a much lower exchange rate, which could reach the extreme of 1 new *leu* for 400 old *lei*.²⁷

The transition from a market economy to a centrally planned economy was initiated by two annual plans, i.e. 1949 and 1950, followed in 1951 by the launch of the First Five-Year Plan. As Ghita Ionescu perceptively observed, the First Five-Year Plan of 1951–1955 “essentially reproduced the pre-war Soviet plans of industrialization and development on a Romanian scale.”²⁸ The largest share of investment, however, was channeled towards the already developed regions, with an emphasis on producer goods.²⁹ Equally important,

²⁶ Health institutions and movie production companies were nationalized on 3 November 1948; pharmacies, drugstores, chemical and pharmaceutical companies, and medical labs were nationalized on 2 April 1949. On 20 April 1950 a considerable part of the urban housing sector was also nationalized. See Dinu C. Giurescu, *Illustrated History of the Romanian People* (Bucharest: Editura Sport-Turism, 1981), 595 and Ghita Ionescu, *Communism in Romania, 1944 – 1962* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1976), 161–67; orig. publ. 1964.

²⁷ Ionescu, *Communism in Romania*, 203–204. See also Turnock, *The Romanian Economy*, 160.

²⁸ The First Romanian Five-Year Plan was devised by Miron Constantinescu. According to Ghita Ionescu, Constantinescu was “a rigid doctrinaire in economic planning, following faithfully the Stalinist line of absolute control and centralization” while he tended “to oppose the tremendous Soviet economic demands on Romania.” Ionescu, *Communism in Romania*, 193. Alexandru Bârlădeanu, a moderate market-socialist reformer, is critical towards Constantinescu’s handling of Romanian economy during the First Five-Year Plan. See Lavinia Betea, *Alexandru Bârlădeanu despre Dej, Ceaușescu și Iliescu* (Alexandru Bârlădeanu on Dej, Ceaușescu, and Iliescu) (Bucharest: Editura Evenimentul Românesc, 1998), 152.

²⁹ Lion’s share of the new investments went to traditional industrial centres such as Bucharest and Brașov (engineering), and Hunedoara and Reșița (metallurgy). See Turnock, *The Romanian Economy*, 162.

the communist regime launched in 1951 the Ten-Year Plan of Electrification and Water Management (1951–1960), a daring enterprise with long-terms implications on the future development of the country.³⁰ In agriculture, the process of collectivization was launched by the Plenum of the Central Committee of the RWP of 3–5 March 1949. The first five collective farms were established on 24 July 1949, and by the end of 1949 their number reached 56.³¹ Nevertheless, the collectivization of Romanian agriculture proved to be more difficult than previously thought, not only because of a mistaken approach, but also because of a steady opposition from a major part of the peasant population.³² Started in 1949, by 1959 the process was by no means finished and only 27.3 percent of the total arable land belonged to collective farms, while private farms still accounted for 26 percent.³³ All in all, the provisions of the First Five-Year Plan were not fulfilled in their entirety. In his report to the Second Congress of the RWP, held on 23–28 December 1955, Gheorghiu-Dej announced that the plan was fulfilled in terms of gross industrial production. Nevertheless, he had to admit that the plan targets were not met in some industrial branches such as steel and laminated steel, coal, coke and coking coal, cement, cellulose,

³⁰ A monumental work – both insightful and documented – on the electrification program under communism in Romania is Ioan Ganea, Marcel Croitoru and Filomenos Savin, eds., *Electrificarea în România, 1951–1992* (Electrification in Romania, 1951–1992) (Bucharest: Editura Tehnică, 1996). On the electrification drive in the early 1950s, see pp. 158–62.

³¹ The first five collective farms were established at Laslea (Sibiu County), Luna de Jos (Cluj County), Râșcani (Vaslui County), Turnișor (Sibiu County) and Zăbani (Arad County). See Dinu C. Giurescu, *Illustrated History*, 602.

³² For more on the collectivization process during the period 1949–1953, see Dan Cățanuș and Octavian Roske, eds., *Colectivizarea agriculturii în România: Dimensiunea politică, 1949–1953* (Collectivization of agriculture in Romania: The political dimension, 1949–1953) (Bucharest: Institutul Național pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, 2000), 33–48.

³³ Tsantis and Pepper, *Romania*, 229.

textiles, footwear, sugar, as well as dairy and fish.³⁴ At the same time, investments in the consumer goods sector remained, as Gheorghiu-Dej put it, “seriously behind the schedule.”³⁵

With regard to the main elements of “civilization,” that is, education, increased mobility of the population, access to information, housing, medical care and supply of consumer goods, some timid improvements were actually made. The Ten-Year Plan of Electrification and Water Management stipulated a rapid pace of rural electrification so that by the end of the period 2,000 villages were to be connected to the national grid. To have an idea about the scale of the project, it suffices to mention that in 1945 only 535 villages from a total number of 15,000 were connected to the national grid. Rural electrification was accompanied by the spread of cheap radiophonic equipment that brought out rural Romania of its autarky. In his report to the Congress, Gheorghiu-Dej announced that during the First Five-Year Plan nine new local radio broadcasting stations were established. Also, he announced that the number of loudspeakers connected to such local radio stations around the country in both urban and rural areas had reached half a million. Moreover, Gheorghiu-Dej stated that the production of radio sets reached 90,000 units per year.³⁶ One should be reminded that interwar Romania had a deplorable network of paved roads. During the period 1948–1955 – Gheorghiu-Dej stated in the front of the Congress – over 1,200 kilometers of roads were modernized and 15.5 kilometers of bridges were built. He had to admit, however, that by the end of

³⁴ See Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, “Raportul de activitate al Comitetului Central al Partidului Muncitoresc Român la Congresul al II-lea al Partidului – 23 decembrie 1955” (Activity Report of the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers’ Party to the Second Congress of the Party – 23 December 1955), in idem, *Articole și cuvîntări: decembrie 1955 – iulie 1959* (Articles and speeches: December 1955 – July 1959) (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1960), 38.

³⁵ Ibid., 39.

³⁶ Dej, *Activity Report to the Second Congress of the Party*, 52.

1955 modernized roads represented only 15 percent of the total road network.³⁷ In 1956, paved roads still made up only 4.8 percent of the total road network of 76,000 km. The regime also engaged in a sustained educational program. It is true that in interwar Romania, the rate of illiteracy substantially declined between 1918 and 1948. However, the vast majority of the population did not have more than four years of primary school. The law of 1948 stated that out of seven years of free education, four were compulsory; in 1955/1956 seven years of school became compulsory in urban areas, followed by a similar provision in 1959/1960 for rural areas.

During the First Five-Year Plan (1951–1955), urban growth averaged some 2.5 percent per year, while the investment in housing represented 10.1 percent of the total investment in the national economy. At the same time, the rate of urban growth and the share of the investment in housing do not say much about the functions performed by the urban centers in Romania. In this respect, the first thing to say about the approach to urbanization adopted by the Gheorghiu-Dej regime is that it focused overwhelmingly on the *industrial* aspect, i.e. the industrial structure of towns. With regard to this issue, there are two major aspects to be discussed. The first relates to a change in terms of employment. For instance, in 1956, in the city of Hunedoara 84.4 percent of the total population active in industries was employed in the secondary sector. For comparison, in 1930 in the city of Hunedoara 38.8 per cent of the population was employed in manufacturing, mining and construction. Similarly, in 1956 in the city of Braşov out of the total population active in industries, 60.7 percent was employed in the secondary sector, while 36.2 was employed in the tertiary sector. For comparison, in 1930 39.1 percent of the population in Braşov was employed in the secondary sector, while 38.6 percent was employed in the tertiary sector. As far as urban employment is concerned, the tertiary sector,

³⁷ Ibid., 51.

which was dominant during the 1930s, suffered a strong decline after World War II and by 1956 lost its first position to manufacturing.³⁸

Second, many of the newly declared towns were mining and heavy manufacturing centers where employment in the secondary sector was, or became, dominant. During the period 1948–1956, the approach of the Gheorghiu-Dej regime to urbanization was also made clear by the provisions of the two administrative reforms, carried out in 1950 and 1952. The most interesting aspect is that fourteen towns – mainly market towns – were deprived of their urban status while twelve of the thirty-two newly declared towns were economically one-sided, as overwhelmingly mining or heavy manufacturing centers.³⁹ It may be argued that of prime importance for the regime was the *industrial* function of urban centers, while their *social* and *cultural* functions were discarded. Furthermore, in *habitational* terms no progress was actually made: the housing sector was underdeveloped and remained so until the mid-1970s.⁴⁰ In fact, during the period 1951–1955 the regime tried to cope with the high demand for dwellings in terms of quantity with no concern for quality. Even the workers, the alleged basis of the new regime, were faced with difficult

³⁸ Ronnås, *Urbanization in Romania*, 156.

³⁹ Baia de Aramă, Dărbani, Fălcu, Filipești Tîrg, Hîrlău, Huedin, Mihăileni, Ostrov, Plenița, Răcari, Săveni, Ștefănești Tîrg, Tîrgu Frumos and Vama lost their urban status. Of the newly declared towns, economically one-sided were notably Anina, Băicoi, Comănești, Doctor Petru Groza, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, Lupeni, Moldova Nouă, Nucet, Petrila and Vulcan. In 1956, in the mining centres of Jiu Valley as Lupeni, Petrila and Vulcan, of the total population active in industries, in the secondary sector were employed: 81.4 percent in Lupeni, 80.5 percent in Petrila and 82.0 percent in Vulcan. See Ronnås, *Urbanization in Romania*, 190, 195, 289.

⁴⁰ In 1975, the housing stock provided an average of 0.978 dwelling per family, which meant a deficit of 150,000 dwellings. At the same time, in 1976, in rural areas there were 1,019 dwellings for each 1,000 families, which meant that the housing deficit was felt in the urban areas. See Tsantis and Pepper, *Romania*, 290.

housing problems. For instance, on March 1954, Gheorghe Apostol, the vice-president of the Romanian Council of Ministers, visited the Metallurgical Combine Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej in Hunedoara to inaugurate a new blast furnace. On that occasion, a delegation came forward and submitted a list of requests in the name of their fellow workers. Housing was one of the four most pressing problems the workers of the Hunedoara combine faced at that moment.⁴¹

Prospects for the future were bright, the official propaganda maintained, but accounts from the period tell a totally different story with regard to the realities of everyday life. Rationing of basic foodstuffs, footwear and textiles lasted until 1954.⁴² There were hard times even for the working class, supposed to be the first and foremost beneficiary of the “socialist transformation” of the society. For instance, an account of December 1955 provides valuable information on the living conditions of the railway workers in the Grivița district of Bucharest, considered a communist “bastion.” The railway workers, especially those who worked on trains, i.e. locomotive conductors, used to buy foodstuffs such as cheese, eggs and meat in the province at lower prices and sell them to relatives and friends in Bucharest in order to earn some extra money.⁴³ In fact, for a significant part of the population in communist Romania the benefits of the “socialist way of life” were actually not coming true.

In his report to the Second Congress of the Party, Gheorghiu-Dej also discussed at length the directives for the Second Five-Year Plan (1956–1960). According to the directives, the Second Five-Year Plan

⁴¹ The workers demanded: (1) a raise in wages; (2) the supply of the protective equipment by the factory; (3) the timely supply of the firewood in winter; and (4) the speedy solution of the housing problems, as many workers still lived in barracks. Romanian Fond, Unit No. 300/60/1/837, Item 11095/54: 3, OSA/RFE Archives.

⁴² On the 1954 renunciation to the rationing system for basic consumer goods see Gheorghiu-Dej, *Activity Report to the Second Congress of the Party*, 50.

⁴³ Romanian Fond, Unit No. 300/60/1/837, Item 4019/56: 4, OSA/RFE Archives.

continued to put a strong emphasis on industrial development, predominantly on: oil and petrochemical industries; steel; electric power production; coal and nonferrous metallurgy. Of the total investment in industry, 20.5 percent was to be allotted to petroleum; 13 percent to chemical, paper and cellulose; 12 percent to ferrous metallurgy; 11 percent to electric power production; 8 percent to coal; 6.5 percent to nonferrous metallurgy; 5 percent to natural gas; 5 percent to textiles, clothing and footwear; 4.5 percent to food processing; 4.5 percent to construction materials; 4.5 percent to machinery and electric equipment; 4 percent to lumber and wood processing; and 1.5 percent to other branches.⁴⁴ During the 1956–1960 Five-Year Plan, the regime envisaged the same policy of sustained economic development following the Stalinist pattern. Consequently, the directives for the Second Five-Year Plan provided a projection of the growth of industrial output in 1960, as compared with the year 1955, for the major industries.⁴⁵

The year 1956, however, would bring major changes to the overall political, as well as economic, strategy of Gheorghiu-Dej. The “secret speech” of Nikita Khrushchev in front of the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), delivered on the night of 24–25 February 1956, shook deeply the leadership of the Romanian communists. The “secret speech,” in which the Soviet leader exposed Stalin’s personality cult opened a new chapter in the history of communist regimes. In Poland and Hungary, the “secret speech” contributed to the emergence of the Polish October of 1956 and, respectively, the 1956 Hungarian Revolution.⁴⁶ In Romania,

⁴⁴ Gheorghiu-Dej, *Activity Report to the Second Congress of the Party*, 73–74.

⁴⁵ For instance, the production of electric power was planned to grow by 80–85 percent in 1960 as compared with 1955, the oil production with 28 percent, coal with 80–90 percent, etc. See the complete set of data in Gheorghiu-Dej, *Activity Report to the Second Congress of the Party*, 76.

⁴⁶ The way in which Gheorghiu-Dej and his group reacted to these events is discussed separately in the section dedicated to the political culture of the Romanian communist regime.

the power elite felt directly threatened by the campaign of de-Stalinization launched by Khrushchev and, more than ever, afraid of losing the total control over party and society. An unexpected chain of events that culminated with the Hungarian revolution of 23 October – 4 November 1956 offered a much needed support for Gheorghiu-Dej and his men that were desperately looking for a solution to avoid de-Stalinization. The power elite in Bucharest reacted swiftly and not only that condemned the Hungarian revolution, but also displayed absolute loyalty towards the Soviets. This permitted the Romanian communist leadership to buy some time and devise a strategy of political survival based on a cautious return to the Romanian traditional values combined with a program of extensive industrialization. Thus, it turned out that the 1956 events in Poland and Hungary favored the strategy of Gheorghiu-Dej to preserve his personal power and ultimately avoid de-Stalinization. The Romanian population, however, sympathized with the 1956 insurgents in Budapest. As post-1989 analyses show, numerous individuals expressed their solidarity with the Hungarian revolution in those days and it was in the city of Timișoara where the manifestations of sympathy towards the Hungarian revolution were the most significant.

Again, the importance of the 1956 events resides in the fact that the ruling elite in Bucharest became concerned with legitimating itself in the eyes of the population. A first measure taken by the regime was to modify its short-term economic strategy in the sense of allotting a larger share to consumption and boosting the production of consumer goods. Gheorghiu-Dej announced this shift in economic policy in his speech delivered to the Plenum of 27–29 December 1956, by stating that the Party decided to allot a larger share of the national income to consumption. “We must orient our efforts – Gheorghiu-Dej proclaimed – towards a massive development of the agricultural production, towards the development of the light and food processing

industries, as well as the housing sector, which are closely linked to the raising of the living standard of the working population.”⁴⁷

Nevertheless, in terms of economic strategy the Second Five-Year Plan presented many inconsistencies. At the time, Gheorghiu-Dej was engaged in a dangerous political game and the stakes were high, since the leader of the Romanian communists was shrewdly maneuvering to preserve his supreme power. Therefore, the economic issues were pushed to the background while the political struggle within the Party came to the foreground. That something was happening and the economic policy of the regime had changed one could also apprehend from Gheorghiu-Dej's exposé to the national meeting of peasants and laborers in the socialist sector of agriculture, held on 3 April 1958. On that occasion, the leader of Romanian communists spoke of the increased output over the previous year 1957 of some major industries such as steel, electric power, oil, natural gas, construction materials, machinery, as well as consumer goods. However, Gheorghiu-Dej compared the production of 1957 with the production of the year 1938 and not with that of the year 1955.⁴⁸ Such a strategy to obscure difficulties in meeting the plan targets by comparing the actual production with the peak year of industrial development in prewar Romania, i.e. the year 1938 would be widely used by both Gheorghiu-Dej and Ceaușescu regimes until the very end of the communist rule in Romania.

⁴⁷ Gheorghiu-Dej, “Raport prezentat la plenara C.C. al P.M.R. din 27–29 decembrie 1956” (Report presented to the Plenum of the CC of RWP of 27–29 December 1956), in idem, *Articole și cuvântări: decembrie 1955 – iulie 1959* (Articles and speeches: December 1955 – July 1959) (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1960), 209.

⁴⁸ Gheorghiu-Dej, “Expunere făcută la consfătuirea pe țară a țăranilor și lucrătorilor din sectorul socialist al agriculturii, Constanța, 3 aprilie 1958” (Exposé to the national meeting of peasants and laborers in the socialist sector of agriculture, Constanța, 3 April 1958), in idem, *Articles and speeches: December 1955 – July 1959*, 369–70.

A particularly important event, that validated the success of Gheorghiu-Dej's strategy of political survival, took place on 25 July 1958 when the last echelon of the Soviet troops stationed in Romania left the country. From that moment until his untimely death, Gheorghiu-Dej was the undisputed leader of the party and the state. Turning back to the economic achievements of the Second Five-Year Plan, it seems that the Party was not pleased with its outcome. As a consequence, in June 1960 the Third Congress of the RWP approved the launch of a Six-Year Plan (1960–1966), which was the only six-year plan enforced under communist rule in Romania. The next period, i.e. 1956–64, which is discussed below, was of major significance due to the reorientation of the Romanian economy towards the West.

Development and emancipation, 1956–1964

The period 1958–1964 represents a key period due to the gradual reorientation of the Romanian economy towards the West as a result of the political strategy based on emancipation from Moscow and extensive industrial development devised by the power elite in Bucharest. As already mentioned, the Hungarian revolution of 1956 offered the Romanian communist elite a wonderful opportunity to display a total subservience to the Kremlin and thus avoid the replacement of Gheorghiu-Dej and his men with a Khrushchevite faction. Such a stance by the Romanian communists led ultimately to the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Romania in July 1958. It may be argued that July 1958 was a watershed in the history of communist Romania. As far as the RWP leadership was concerned, it signaled that the period of learning by doing came to an end for both Gheorghiu-Dej – once a humble railway worker but by now

the uncontested leader of RWP,⁴⁹ and his followers. The small “group from prisons” led by Gheorghiu-Dej, became a confident and experienced power elite with an increased room to maneuver after the Soviets withdrew their troops from Romania.

At the same time, one could identify a major shift with regard to the legitimating discourse of the RWP supreme leader. From July 1958 on, both the Party and its supreme leader had to legitimate themselves in the eyes of the population and this implied a return to traditional values in parallel with some economic improvement. For instance, Gheorghiu-Dej’s report to the enlarged plenum of the CC of the RWP, held on 13–14 July 1959, is almost entirely dedicated to the strategy of the Party for improving the standard of living of the population.⁵⁰ Actually, in the immediate aftermath of the Hungarian revolution the Romanian communists did make some efforts to improve the situation of the population in order to avoid the spreading of unrest to Romania. Thus, during the 1956–1960 period 82.9 percent of the national income went to consumption and only 17.1 percent was allotted to accumulation.⁵¹

One of the major economic achievements of the 1950s was undoubtedly the completion of the 1951–1960 Electrification Plan.

⁴⁹ Corneliu Coposu was the most representative political figure of the reborn National Peasant Party in the post-1989 period and a survivor of the Romanian Gulag. In his recollections, he emphasized the astonishing transformation of Gheorghiu-Dej from a humble worker animated by communist ideas, rather intimidated by Ana Pauker and Vasile Luca, into a tough and cynical communist leader who ordered the assassination of Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu. See Corneliu Coposu, *Dialoguri cu Vartan Arachelian* (Dialogues with Vartan Arachelian) (Bucharest: Editura Anastasia, 1991), 76–77, as well as idem, *Confesiuni: Dialoguri cu Doina Alexandru* (Confessions: Dialogues with Doina Alexandru) (Bucharest: Editura Anastasia, 1996).

⁵⁰ Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, “Raport prezentat la Plenara lărgită a C.C. al P.M.R. din 13–14 iulie 1959” (Report presented to the enlarged Plenum of the C.C. of the RWP), in idem, *Articles and speeches: December 1955 – July 1959*, 643–76.

⁵¹ Maria Mureșan, *Evoluții economice, 1945–1990* (Economic evolutions, 1945–1990) (Bucharest: Editura Economică, 1995), 87.

A thorough post-1989 analysis of the plan indicates that between 1951 and 1960 Romania increased tremendously the domestic energy production and developed a wide infrastructure in terms of personnel, research and training. Also, between 1951 and 1960 large investments were undertaken and new power plants, whose installed capacity amounted to 1,039 MW, were built. Compared to 1950, when the overall installed capacity was only 740 MW, in 1960 the overall installed capacity reached 1,779 MW. The overall installed capacity, however, did not meet the provisions of the Electrification Plan that envisaged an installed capacity of 2,000 MW by 1960. Nevertheless, in terms of annual production of electric power the plan targets were exceeded due to an extended period of utilization of the existing capacities: from 2.1 TWh in 1950, it reached 7.65 TWh in 1960. As for the power plants built during the period 1951–1960, the most important were the Doicești, Fântânele (Sîngeorgiu de Pădure), Paroșeni and Borzești thermoelectric power plants and the Bicăz (Stejaru) hydroelectric power plant.⁵² It should be emphasized that during the period under scrutiny only one major hydroelectric power plant was built, i.e. Bicăz. In spite of their efficiency and capacity to produce clean energy, hydroelectric power plants require larger investments and longer construction periods than their thermoelectric counterparts. At the same time, the policy of rapid industrial development and extensive rural electrification enforced by the regime was better served by thermoelectric power plants that could be erected more rapidly and at lower costs. Nevertheless, what is important for the present analysis is that the 1951–1960 Electrification Plan was quite successful and had a decisive contribution in raising the living standard of the population during the following decade.

On 8 May 1961, in his report to the meeting dedicated to the celebration of 40 years since the establishment of the Romanian Communist Party, Gheorghiu-Dej referred to the provisions of the

⁵² Ganea, Croitoru and Savin, eds., *Electrification in Romania*, 162.

Six-Year Plan (1960–1966) and reiterated the determination of the Party to continue the rapid pace of industrialization. In this respect, the stance of the Party was crystal clear and Gheorghiu-Dej expressed it in plain words: “At the center of Party’s activity stays the socialist industrialization – the preponderant development of heavy industry with its pivotal sub-sector, the engineering goods (machinery) industry.”⁵³ Furthermore, Gheorghiu-Dej affirmed that in 1960, which was the first year of the Six-Year Plan, the gross industrial production rose about 17 percent compared with the previous year. Moreover, during the first trimester of 1961 the gross industrial production grew 18 percent compared with the similar period in 1960. These figures, quite difficult to check today, were meant primarily to convey a single message: that the Party was determined to pursue the same policy of sustained industrial development.⁵⁴

Nevertheless, the issue of the strategy of economic development adopted by the power elite in Bucharest vigorously surfaced when Nikita Khrushchev announced his project of the so-called “division of labor within the socialist camp.” In June 1962, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) adopted a document entitled “Principles for the International Division of Labor,” which stressed the idea of “socialist economic collaboration” in the sense of a division of labor within the communist bloc between the industrialized north and the agrarian south. The project was strongly supported by Czechoslovakia and East Germany, the most industrialized “fraternal” countries. Alexandru Bârlădeanu, the representative of Romania to the CMEA (1955–1966), recalls that during a meeting of the organization the East German delegation actually proposed that Romania should grow maize and raise pigs that would be processed

⁵³ Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, *40 de ani de luptă a Partidului sub steagul atotbiruitor al Marxism-Leninismului* (40 years of struggle under the triumphant flag of Marxism-Leninism) (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1961), 24.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 25–27.

in East Germany. All in all, Bârlădeanu maintains, the Romanian communists perceived Khrushchev's plan as an attempt at transforming their country into a sort of colony of the more industrialized East Germany and Czechoslovakia, while the Soviet Union would have directed the whole project.⁵⁵

Obviously, Gheorghiu-Dej fiercely opposed such ideas, all the more that Romania had already started in 1961 the building of a large integrated iron and steel works in the town of Galați, located in the southeast of the country, in order to stir economic development.⁵⁶ The Galați Iron and Steel Complex was finally inaugurated in 1966. The initial reluctance of the Soviets to support the Galați steel mill project contributed decisively to the economic opening of communist Romania towards the West. Moreover, Romania started to produce machinery and equipment under Western licenses. A witness account speaks of Khrushchev's irritation when he was invited during his visit to Romania in June 1962 to the Electroputere Craiova enterprise to see the Romanian-made 2,100 HP diesel-electric locomotive.⁵⁷ Romania also engaged in other major collaborative economic projects. Thus, in order to boost the hydroelectric power production, on 30 November 1963 Romania and Yugoslavia signed in Belgrade the convention concerning the building of a large hydroelectric and navigation complex on the Danube at Porțile de Fier (Iron Gates) with an installed capacity of 2,050 MW. The launch of the Yugoslavian-Romanian joint project was all the more telling of the increasingly independent policy of Romania since Yugoslavia was not a member of the

⁵⁵ See Betea, *Bârlădeanu on Dej, Ceaușescu and Iliescu*, 149.

⁵⁶ For more on the Galați iron and steel works project see Turnock, *The Romanian Economy*, 199–200.

⁵⁷ See Silviu Brucan, *Generația irosită: Memorii* (The vanished generation: Memoirs) (Bucharest: Editurile Universul & Calistrat Hogaș, 1992), 86–87. On Khrushchev's 1962 visit to Romania see also Paul Niculescu-Mizil, *O istorie trăită* (A lived history) (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 1997), 164–76.

CMEA.⁵⁸ The Iron Gates worksite was inaugurated on 7 September 1964 in the presence of the communist leaders of Romania and Yugoslavia, Gheorghiu-Dej and Josip Broz Tito. After completion, the hydroelectric and navigation complex was inaugurated on 16 May 1972 in the presence of Ceaușescu and Tito.⁵⁹

Another conflict within the CMEA opened when geographer E. B. Valev published in February 1964 an article concerning the creation of an “interstate economic complex” composed of parts of southern Soviet Union, south-east Romania and northern Bulgaria.⁶⁰ The project envisaged the cooperation between the Soviet Union, Romania and Bulgaria for the creation of a so-called Lower Danube Economic Complex encompassing a surface of 150,000 square kilometers, of which Romania would have contributed with 100,000, Bulgaria with 38,000 and the Soviet Union with 12,000. To be sure, Gheorghiu-Dej and his men perceived the idea of a transnational economic region put forward by Valev as a direct threat to their independence from the Soviet Union. Consequently, they fiercely criticized the article.⁶¹ Nevertheless, the industrialization program devised by the power elite

⁵⁸ The Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) or Comecon was established in Moscow in January 1949. Its founding members were the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland and Romania. GDR joined the Comecon in 1950; CMEA was officially dismantled in February 1991. See Aldcroft and Morewood, *Economic Change in Eastern Europe since 1918*, 133, 204.

⁵⁹ Matei Ionescu and Z. Ornea, *Compendiu românesc* (Romanian compendium), in *Almanahul Științei 1967* (Bucharest), 45–46, 125. See also Dinu C. Giurescu, ed., *Istoria României în date* (History of Romania in data) (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2003), 578, 627–28.

⁶⁰ Georgescu, *The Romanians*, 245.

⁶¹ An official scholarly rejection of Valev’s article appeared in the form of an article published in the economic periodical *Viața economică* (Economic life) (Bucharest) No. 24 (43), 12 June 1964; Internet, http://www.cnsas.ro/documente/istoria_comunism/documente_PMR_PCR/documente_programatice/1964%20Relatiile%20economice%20dintre%20tarile%20socialiste.pdf; accessed 16 October 2010. On the debates within the RCP and the rejection of Valev’s article see Niculescu-Mizil, *A lived history*, 235–50.

in Bucharest was only one of the elements of an astute policy of independence from Moscow. Such a policy culminated with the Declaration of April 1964 – which may be considered the “declaration of autonomy” of the Romanian communists, and the general amnesty that led to the liberation of a overwhelming majority of the political prisoners by the end of 1964.⁶²

A question, however, still needs a convincing answer: How far was Gheorghiu-Dej prepared to go along the path of economic reforms? It seems that, in spite of his flexible policies, Gheorghiu-Dej did not envisage a comprehensive reform of the system. Although the information on this particular aspect of Gheorghiu-Dej’s vision of economic development is still scarce and contradictory, some witness accounts shed some light on the issue. According to his men, the first communist leader of Romania was determined to pursue a policy of economic reforms. Bârlădeanu, himself a communist reformer somehow in the spirit of the Czech Ota Sik, claims that Gheorghiu-Dej intended to grant autonomy to collective farms, thus allowing them to function according to the free market mechanism. Gheorghiu-Dej envisaged a sort of economic liberalization, Bârlădeanu maintains, but he also admits that Gheorghiu-Dej made no clear statements that would allow one determine if the supreme leader of the Party was thinking of a global

⁶² Economic history of communist Romania was also rewritten in 1964. For instance, a volume edited by the Romanian Academy and published in the summer of 1964, i.e. after the Declaration of April, overlooks Romania’s economic subservience to the Soviet Union during the 1950s. See Vasile Malinschi, Roman Moldovan and Vasile Rausser, eds., *Industria Romîniei, 1944–1964* (Romania’s Industry, 1944–1964) (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Republicii Populare Române, 1964), 29–61. A work on a similar topic, published in the summer of 1961, places a greater emphasis on the economic relations between Romania and the Soviet Union. See Vasile Rausser, “Economia națională a Republicii Populare Române în etapa desăvîșirii construcției socialismului” (National economy of Romania during the period of completing the construction of socialism), in I. Rachmuth, ed., *Studii de economie socialistă* (Studies of socialist economy) (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Republicii Populare Române, 1961), 7–39.

economic reform.⁶³ To his part, Gheorghe Apostol goes as far as to argue that, after succeeded in gaining independence from Moscow, Gheorghiu-Dej intended to head Romania towards both economic and political liberalization. Another prominent former nomenklatura member, Ion Gheorghe Maurer, claims that the untimely death of Gheorghiu-Dej stopped the trend towards economic reforms.⁶⁴

Closely watched relaxation, 1964–1977

Apparently, the rise to power of Nicolae Ceaușescu following the death of Gheorghiu-Dej after a galloping cancer did not represent the coming of a new era.⁶⁵ Gheorghiu-Dej died on 19 March 1965 and the Plenum of the CC of the RCP of 22 March sanctioned the election of Nicolae Ceaușescu as Secretary General of the Party. Not unexpectedly, the Ceaușescu regime followed until the late 1960s the developmental pattern established by Gheorghiu-Dej. On 19 July 1965, in his report to the Ninth Party Congress, Ceaușescu stated: “In the future, the industrialization of the country, especially the development of the heavy industry with an emphasis on the heavy machinery industry will remain at the core of our Party’s policy.”⁶⁶

⁶³ See Betea, *Bârlădeanu on Dej, Ceaușescu, and Iliescu*, 156.

⁶⁴ Betea, *Bârlădeanu on Dej, Ceaușescu, and Iliescu*, 112 and 156; Idem, *Maurer and the yesterday world*, 151–52 and 265.

⁶⁵ For more on Gheorghiu-Dej’s illness see Pierre du Bois, “Ultimele zile ale lui Gheorghiu-Dej” (The last days of Gheorghiu-Dej), *Dosarele Istoriei* (Dossiers of History) (Bucharest) Nr.3 (1997), 47–50.

⁶⁶ Nicolae Ceaușescu, “Raportul Comitetului Central al Partidului Comunist Român cu privire la activitatea partidului în perioada dintre Congresul al VIII-lea și Congresul al IX-lea al P.C.R.” (Report of the CC of RCP concerning the activity of the Party during the period between the Eighth and the Ninth Congresses of the Party), in idem, *România pe drumul desăvârșirii construcției socialiste – Rapoarte, cuvîntări, articole, iulie 1965 – septembrie 1966* (Romania on the path of completing the socialist construction: Reports, speeches, articles, July 1965 – September 1966) (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1968), 20.

Nevertheless, a timid attempt to reform the Romanian command economy was made in the late 1960s by Alexandru Bârlădeanu. As already mentioned, Bârlădeanu was a moderate market-socialist reformer and a supporter of the more flexible policies introduced by Gheorghiu-Dej during his last period in power. Bârlădeanu recalls that he had an argument with Ceaușescu over the separation of national income into consumption and accumulation as early as 1965, just before the opening of the Ninth Congress of RCP, because Ceaușescu wanted a larger share to be allocated to accumulation.⁶⁷ By 1968 however it became clear that the reformist views of some nomenklatura members such as Bârlădeanu were in sharp contrast with the rigid economic ideas of the supreme leader of the Party and had therefore no chance to materialize.

In terms of economic development, the Ceaușescu regime imposed a rapid pace of industrialization. The table presented below reflects the distribution between the consumption fund and accumulation fund over the period 1951–1989.⁶⁸ As one can easily grasp from the data presented below, over the five five-year periods that make up the interval 1951–1975, the accumulation fund grew steadily with the exception of the 1956–1960 period, when the Party made hastily some adjustments in the aftermath of the Hungarian Revolution in order to raise the share of consumption.

Five-year period	Consumption fund	Accumulation fund
1951–1955	75.7	24.3
1956–1960	82.9	17.1
1961–1965	74.5	25.5
1966–1970	70.5	29.5
1971–1975	66.3	33.7
1976–1980	64.0	36.0
1981–1985	69.3	30.7
1986–1989	74.3	25.7

⁶⁷ Betea, *Bîrlădeanu on Dej, Ceaușescu, and Iliescu*, 193–97.

⁶⁸ Reproduced after Table 2.2. in Mureșan, *Economic evolutions, 1945–1990*, 87. See also Table 5.1. Use of National Income (in Comparable Prices) for Consumption and Accumulation, 1951–55 to 1971–75, in Tsantis and Pepper, *Romania*, 82.

As already noted, one has to bear in mind that in a command economy the choice of establishing a high rate of accumulation is primarily political. Costin Murgescu, one of the prominent economists of the communist period, argued in this respect:

The fundamental political choice in the national plan – a choice that influences directly or indirectly all of its other constituents – concerns the concrete fixing of those parts of the national income which are allocated to the fund for economic and social development, on the one hand, and to the consumption fund, on the other.... The general conclusion was reached that a lower rate of accumulation would allow present [1974] living standards to rise faster *in the short run*; but, at the same time, lowering the rate of accumulation would have negative effects on overall economic development and this would diminish *in the long run* the very material basis of systematically accelerating the improvement of living conditions for the entire population [original emphasis].⁶⁹

Data presented above clearly indicate that Ceaușescu intensified the policy of sustained industrialization and urbanization devised by his predecessor. As a consequence, between 1960 and 1977 the percentage of urban population grew from 32.1 to 47.5 percent of the total population, while the percentage of rural population declined from 67.9 percent in 1960 to 52.5 percent in 1977. The rapid pace of industrialization resulted in the growth of population involved in industry; thus, the labor force employed in industry grew from 19.2 percent in 1960 and 30.6 percent in 1975. At the same time, the percentage of population involved in agriculture (except for forestry) declined from 56.5 percent in 1960 to 37.8 percent in 1975. In absolute numbers, the population employed in agriculture decreased from 6,233,000 persons in 1960 to 3,837,000 persons in 1975, whereas the total labor force increased from 9,538,000 persons in

⁶⁹ Costin Murgescu, *Romania's Socialist Economy: An Introduction to a Contemporary Experience of Economic Development*, translated from Romanian by Leon Jaeger (Bucharest: Meridiane Publishing House, 1974), 77–79.

1960 to 10,150,000 persons in 1975. In terms of social composition of the population, the changes that occurred during the 1956–1977 period are telling. Of the total population, the Romanian working class – “blue collar workers,” including foremen – evolved as follows: from 23.7 percent in 1956, to 39.9 percent in 1966 and to and 54.3 percent in 1977.⁷⁰ Simply put, it was the program of sustained industrialization enforced by the communist regime that led to the actual creation of the Romanian working class.

All in all, between 1964 and 1977 Romania experienced a period of economic achievements. One could feel that something had changed, in the sense that communism in Romania was trying to adopt a less ferocious face. One of the best analyses of economic development under communist rule in Romania ever published in the West, i.e. *Economic Development in Communist Romania* by John Michael Montias, published in 1967, suggests that in terms of social and economic change the claims of the regime were true in many respects. As Montias aptly puts it:

Official Rumanian propaganda is so strident and repetitious in proclaiming the economic accomplishments of the Communist regime that a Westerner accustomed to more subtle means of persuasion may become quite obdurate to its claims. Nonetheless, much of what it blares is true. Industrial output had indeed grown very fast; health conditions have vastly improved; education has spread; new technical skills have been developed; and consumption levels have risen since the late 1930's not only because the majority of peasants and industrial workers live somewhat better but also because so many peasant families have moved to town and acceded to the higher standards of urban living.⁷¹

⁷⁰ See Table SA1.12, *Employment in the State Sector, by Professional Category, 1950, 1955, 1960, 1965, and 1970–76*, in Tsantis and Pepper, *Romania*, 542–43.

⁷¹ John Michael Montias, *Economic Development in Communist Rumania* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1967), 1.

It is also worth noting that the assessment of the economic performance of communist Romania provided by Montias was appreciated rather positively by Costin Murgescu – perhaps the most prominent economist agreed by the communist regime, who wrote:

No doubt, Montias is looking at the Romanian economy from a different standpoint than that of Marxist researchers. Nevertheless, his study has got the merit of being an effort to look at it objectively “from outside the socialist world.” Although I do not share some of the remarks or conclusions of the American economist, I admit that Prof. Montias’ analysis is the most penetrating one ever made by a non-Marxist writer of the national economy of Romania.⁷²

True, the regime could claim that major achievements were made in the economic realm. However, the claim that that, between 1950 and 1975 the Romanian economy grew at an average compound rate of over 9 percent is highly questionable. It should be added that Costin Murgescu even claimed that between 1951 and 1972 the national income of Romania increased at an annual average rate of 9.6 percent.⁷³ In this respect, economist Peter Bauer raised a simple question: What was the economic situation of Romania in 1950? To find a valid answer to such a question, Bauer de-compounded the 9 percent rate of growth advanced by the regime and the result was perplexing: in 1950 the Romanian economy would have been so small that it could not sustain human life on the available income.⁷⁴

It is also important to mention that Ceaușescu lacked the proverbial ability of Gheorghiu-Dej to evaluate properly the long-term effects of the political decisions made at the level of the power elite. Especially in the economic realm, Ceaușescu proved to be highly

⁷² Costin Murgescu, *Romania’s Socialist Economy*, 14.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁷⁴ Cited in Mark Almond, *The Rise and Fall of Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu* (London: Chapman Publishers, 1992), 118–19.

dogmatic and rigid and this became crystal clear especially after the Eleventh Congress of the RCP, held in November 1974. In his report to the Eleventh Congress, delivered on 25 November 1974, Ceaușescu stated that during the 1976–1980 Five-Year Plan the RCP would firmly continue the policy of socialist industrialization of the country.⁷⁵ In spite of the fact that the world economy had just experienced the first oil shock in 1973, the RCP pursued adamantly a policy of massive expansion of the metallurgical, petrochemical and heavy machinery industries. However, a crucial issue conspicuously overlooked by the central planners was that beginning in 1972–1973 Romania shifted from an energy surplus to a net energy deficit.⁷⁶ The measures taken in the aftermath of the 1973 oil shock were, nevertheless, disappointing. An emergency decree was issued on 18 November 1973, but its effect on the overall energy consumption was limited. In fact, the measures put forward were rather administrative, like raising the price of gasoline for private consumption or introducing controls of space heating, while very little was done in terms of rethinking the overall strategy of economic development.

The Party continued to develop the industrial branches characterized by high levels of energy consumption such as heavy metallurgical industries (primarily iron and steel). As a consequence, the demand for energy in industry grew steadily and the regime had to take measures to cope with it. Quite naturally, the central planners decided to put a stronger emphasis on the development of domestic energy resources such as hydropower and coal. Hydroelectric power stations necessitated large investments and took long periods of time to be built. Thermal electric power is based on coal and Romania has limited resources of high-quality coal. Consequently, the energy

⁷⁵ Nicolae Ceaușescu, *Raport la cel de-al XI-lea Congres al Partidului Comunist Român* (Report to the Eleventh Congress of the RCP) (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1974), 47. On the RCP's projections concerning the annual rate of growth of the main industrial branches during the 1976–1980 Five-Year Plan, see pp. 48–53.

⁷⁶ Tsantis and Pepper, *Romania*, 331.

sector had to rely on the lignite deposits located mainly in the Gorj County. The main mining centers of the area were (and still are) Motru and Rovinari, located near the county capital Țîrgu Jiu. Furthermore, the calorific value of the Romanian lignite is quite low (1,600–1,970 kilocalories/kg), which posed major technical problems. A first problem was the organization of the mining process due to the large quantities of lignite requested by the thermal power stations, which had to be fuelled regularly. As a consequence, thermal power stations using lignite had to be built near the mines.⁷⁷ A second problem was related to the process of burning the lignite in thermal power stations. Due to the poor quality of the lignite, the burning process was characterized by large variations of temperature that damaged rapidly the pipes that constituted the boiler, a core element of a thermal power station. Apart from the energy-related issues, the supreme leader of the Party was determined to engage in extremely costly, gigantesque projects of doubtful economic efficiency. Thus, in 1973 it was decided to resume the construction of the Danube – Black Sea Canal.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ For instance, a large thermal power station was built nearby the Rovinari open-cast mining exploitation. The first unit of 330 MW at the Rovinari power station was inaugurated on 15 December 1975. See Constantin Voican, “Istoria se scrie sub ochii noștri: Cronologie selectivă extrasă din colecția Scînteii” (History is being written under our eyes: Selective chronology from the Scînteia collection), in *Almanah Scînteia* 1977 (Scînteia Almanac 1977) (Bucharest), 46.

⁷⁸ The resuming of the works to the Danube – Black Sea navigation system was first discussed at the Plenum of CC of the RCP held on 18–19 June 1973. See Constantin Voican, “Istoria se scrie sub ochii noștri: Cronologie selectivă extrasă din colecția Scînteii” (History is being written under our eyes: Selective chronology from the Scînteia collection), in *Almanah Scînteia* 1974 (Scînteia Almanac 1974) (Bucharest), 128–29. However, the general plan for the execution of the canal was approved at the Meeting of the CC of the RCP on 9 May 1978. See idem, “Istoria se scrie sub ochii noștri: Cronologie selectivă extrasă din colecția Scînteii” (History is being written under our eyes: Selective chronology from the Scînteia collection), in *Almanah Scînteia* 1979 (Scînteia Almanac 1979) (Bucharest), 118.

Having said this, let us turn back to the economic achievements of the period 1964–1977. During this period the regime paid a special attention to the housing sector. Again, the data provided below should be considered, similar to all official statistics of the communist period, with a large grain of salt. Nevertheless, the authorities made efforts to augment the housing stock and improve the quality of housing. According to the official data, in 1975 new urban housing represented 81.7 percent of total housing; for comparison, in 1965 urban housing represented only 45.3 percent of the total.⁷⁹ Similarly, the average number of persons for each dwelling (urban and rural combined) decreased over the 1965–1975 period from 3.66 in 1965, to 3.44 in 1970 and to 3.17 in 1975. In urban areas, the average number of persons per dwelling was 3.27 in 1965; 3.51 in 1970; and 3.17 in 1975.⁸⁰ Also, improvements were made with regard to the habitational aspects of urban living. The number of newly built dwellings with three or more rooms increased, allowing therefore more living space per person. For instance, in 1965 out of a total of 191,988 dwellings put into occupancy, one-room dwellings amounted to 57,116 (29.8 percent); two-room dwellings amounted to 85,080 (44.3 percent), while dwellings with three rooms or more amounted to 49,792 (25.9 percent). In 1970, there were 159,152 dwellings put into occupancy, of which 26,548 (16.7 percent) with one room; 83,935 (52.7 percent) with two rooms; and 48,669 (30.6 percent) with three rooms and over. Finally, in 1975 out of a total of 165,431 dwellings put into occupancy, 14,952 (9.0 percent) had one room; 83,148 (50.3 percent) had two rooms; and 67,331 (40.7

⁷⁹ See Table SA8.7, *Housing Turned over to Occupancy, 1965–1976*, in Tsantis and Pepper, *Romania*, 666–71.

⁸⁰ See Table 12.9, *Average Number of Persons for Each Dwelling, 1965, 1970 and 1975*, in Tsantis and Pepper, *Romania*, 295. The increase in the number of persons per dwelling during the 1965–1970 period can be explained by the sudden rise in the birth rate after 1966 due to regime's policy of forced natality.

percent) had three rooms or more.⁸¹ As one can observe from the data presented above, while in 1965 the number of dwellings with three or more rooms put into occupancy represented 25.9 percent of the total, in 1975 the same type of dwellings made up 40.7 percent of the total.

Although the quality of housing improved appreciably, the housing stock did not grow in accordance with the growth in population and therefore demand remained high. In 1975, for instance, in urban areas the housing deficit amounted to 150,000 dwellings. Nevertheless, visible changes occurred and, especially in Bucharest, the urban landscape was transformed. In 1959 it was started the construction of the Drumul Taberei district, with more than 60,000 apartments in high-rise buildings. The work at another large district of apartment buildings, the Balta Albă – Titan district, was initiated in 1966.⁸² Furthermore, between 1968–1969 it was erected the new building of the Romanian Television. In 1968 was started the construction work at the monumental Intercontinental Hotel, which was inaugurated on 14 May 1971, and the new National Theatre, both located in the University Square.⁸³ A new international airport, the Bucharest – Otopeni airport, was inaugurated on 8 April 1970.

It must be stressed once again that a thorough examination of this period is essential in analyzing the “civilizing” trends under Romanian communism and therefore the popular perceptions of the regime. It was exactly that period of economic improvement and relative ideological relaxation that led to a rise of the expectations of a majority

⁸¹ See Table 12.12, *Housing Put into Occupancy, by Number of Rooms and Sources of Funds, 1965–1975*, in Tsantis and Pepper, *Romania*, 298–99.

⁸² Constantin Olteanu et al., eds., *București – Omagiu Marelui Erou* (Bucharest: Homage to the great hero) (Bucharest: Editura Meridiane, 1988), 159.

⁸³ Marin Nedelea, *Istoria României în date, 1940–1995* (Romania's history in data) (Bucharest: Editura Niculescu, 1997), 176.

of the population. In her book of memoirs, Sanda Stolojan, the official interpreter of the French president Charles de Gaulle during his official visit to Romania (14–18 May 1968), speaks convincingly of the sense of hope the population experienced in those days. Her account, coming from a critical exiled intellectual is all the more relevant: “In spite of poverty and cramming, the houses, churches, streets were not yet disfigured or destroyed. The heart of the city continued to beat. Hope was in the air, I could feel it that month in 1968 beyond the pallid faces and damaged façades.”⁸⁴

Indeed, compared with the grim 1950s, things had changed for the better. During the period 1964–1977, numerous families moved in a new flat, usually rented from the state. Some even bought their flats with loans from the state through the Savings and Consignment Bank (*Casa de Economii și Consemnațiuni* – CEC). For such loans, repayment periods were established at 15, 20 and 25 years; respectively, the minimum down payment was 30, 25 or 20 percent of the value of the purchase.⁸⁵ Loans were also available for buying durable goods. One can still find in many Romanian homes the famous *Bîlea* living room furniture set, a real hit of the late 1960s and early 1970s and a much-desired sign of modernity – in communist terms, to be sure. Furthermore, the domestic production of household appliances gained momentum. Thus, cooking, washing and sewing machines, vacuum cleaners, as well as TV and radio sets entered the homes of many Romanians. Radio sets, under different product names such as *Select*, *Eforie* and *Traviata*, were already a familiar presence in numerous homes. Equally important, during that period many Romanians bought their first TV set. In the beginning, the TV sets were usually imported from the Soviet Union

⁸⁴ Sanda Stolojan, *Cu de Gaulle în România* (With de Gaulle in Romania) (Bucharest: Editura Albatros, 1994), 36.

⁸⁵ For a discussion on the terms and conditions of loans for the purchase of apartments built by the state see Tsantis and Pepper, *Romania*, 291–92.

and many Romanians still remember the black and white Soviet-made *Rubin* (Ruby) TV set on which they watched the first cartoons of their childhood. Subsequently, it was initiated the domestic production of TV sets and Romanian-made products such as *Miraj*, *Venus*, *Opera*, *Lux* or *Diana* replaced the Soviet-made ones. Refrigerators represented another sign of progress, and those born in the 1960s recall the familiar presence of a *Fram* refrigerator – named after Fram the polar bear, the main character of a popular novel for children by writer Cezar Petrescu – in the kitchen of their parents. In the early 1970s, the more advanced *Frigero* model – in two versions, *Frigero Super* and *Frigero Lux* – replaced the outdated Fram. Other common appliances widely available were the *Carpați* (Carpathians) cooking machines, *Alba Lux* washing machines, *Practic* and *Ideal* vacuum cleaners, and *Ileana* and *Nicoleta* sewing machines.

In 1967, PECO, the sole national distribution company for petrol and lubricants launched an advertisement that read: “Poate oare un Trabant remorca un elefant? E neverosimil? Cu benzina PECO totul e posibil!” (Is it possible for a Trabant to tow an elephant? Is it unbelievable? With the PECO gasoline everything is possible!). As one can easily grasp, the advertisement focused on the popular Trabant car produced in a “fraternal” country: the German Democratic Republic. Nevertheless, the same advertisement mentioned, in small print, that PECO also distributed lubricants fit for Renault and Fiat engines. It should be mentioned that at the time Romania did not manufacture automobiles, and consequently passenger vehicles were imported mainly from the Soviet bloc countries, i.e. Soviet Union (Volga and Moskvitch, later on Lada), Czechoslovakia (Škoda) and East Germany (Trabant and Wartburg). At the same time, as the advertisement quoted above shows, in the second half of the 1960s French (Renault) and Italian (Fiat) cars were imported as well.

The domestic production of automobiles however was initiated in 1968. On 20 August 1968 it was inaugurated the Pitești

Automobile Plant, which started the production of cars under a licence purchased from the French manufacturer Renault. Production started with the Dacia 1100 model – the Romanian version of Renault 8, and continued from the early 1970s onwards with Dacia 1300 and its subsequent variants – the Romanian version of Renault 12.⁸⁶ As a consequence, many families managed to buy their first car, usually a Dacia 1100 or the larger Dacia 1300.⁸⁷ Gasoline was still cheap in the late 1960s – early 1970s,⁸⁸ and numerous families managed to spend their summer holidays away from home, usually on the Black Sea Coast or in the Carpathians.

The Party also encouraged a better use of the leisure time by the population. For instance, the first issue of the *Scînteia* Almanac – the offspring of the Party newspaper *Scînteia* – published in 1967 pays an appreciable attention to tourism, cultural tourism included. It contains, among others, useful lists of the most relevant museums, historical monuments and sites, spas and mountain resorts, chalets in the Carpathians, petrol stations and garages. The same almanac also contains an article entitled “What are you doing in your leisure time?”⁸⁹ In fact, the *Scînteia* Almanac represents a valuable source

⁸⁶ For more on the Pitești enterprise in its early stages of development see C. Ștefănescu, C. Moroșan and I. Soare, *Monografia Uzinei de Autoturisme Pitești* (The monograph of the Pitești Automobile Enterprise) (Pitești: n.p., 1972).

⁸⁷ The production of the Pitești enterprise grew steadily. On 18 June 1975 the Pitești Automobile Plant celebrated the manufacturing of the Dacia car with the number 200,000. See Constantin Voican, “Istoria se scrie sub ochii noștri: Cronologie selectivă extrasă din colecția Scînteii” (History is being written under our eyes: Selective chronology from the Scînteia collection), in *Almanah Scînteia 1976* (Scînteia Almanac 1976) (Bucharest), 52.

⁸⁸ The price of gasoline was raised in 1973 because of the oil crisis. The price of premium gasoline was raised from 2.50 lei/l to 4.50 lei/l while the price of regular gasoline was raised from 1.75 lei/l to 4.30 lei/l. Tsantis and Pepper, *Romania*, 345.

⁸⁹ See *Almanah Scînteia 1967* (Scînteia Almanac 1967) (Bucharest), 257–68, 305–52 and 380–92.

for the analysis of the Party policy towards leisure time. In this respect, one can understand that something changed in terms of the Party policy regarding leisure time and tourism by the end of the period under scrutiny by analyzing the *Scînteia Almanac 1977*. In that almanac, not a single article refers to tourism or leisure.⁹⁰ Turning back to the late 1960s and the early 1970s, it should be mentioned that trips to the communist countries were organized more frequently. More importantly, common people were allowed to travel outside the communist bloc, and many took their first trip to the West in the late 1960s – early 1970s.

However, the period in which Romanian communism showed for once some decency came to an end in the mid-1970s. Moreover, a sharp reversal in terms of both economic conditions and political freedoms occurred in the early 1980s and a large part of the population became increasingly dissatisfied with the regime. It is the scope of the next section to analyze the causes of the structural economic crisis that characterized the period 1977–1989 and contributed significantly to collapse of the regime in December 1989.

Crisis and decline, 1977–1989

From the viewpoint of the side effects of the policy of extensive industrial development enforced by the RCP, the year 1977 represented a turning point.⁹¹ Due to the rigid economic beliefs of the supreme leader of the Party, from 1974 onwards the Romanian

⁹⁰ See *Almanah Scînteia 1977* (*Scînteia Almanac 1977*) (Bucharest).

⁹¹ For an official point of view on the economic development of communist Romania during the 1965–1977 period see *România pe calea socialismului și comunismului: Cifre și fapte* (Romania on the road towards socialism and communism: Figures and facts) (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1977).

economy became even more centralized. Furthermore, in spite of the fact that the size of the country and its natural resources could not sustain an economic strategy focusing overwhelmingly on heavy industry, the regime continued to invest heavily in new production units. The lack of domestic resources and the unfavorable international economic context did not provoke any serious debate on the developmental strategy of the country at the power elite level. On the contrary, in a majority of the cases the top party officials just echoed the simplistic ideas of the secretary general of the RCP. For instance, in an article entitled "Romania's Development Strategy" and published in 1984, when Romania had already entered a period of chronic shortages, a prominent nomenklatura member, Manea Mănescu, wrote:

The necessity to allot an important, rationally determined part of the national income for accumulation, as a long-standing political and economic option, has become part and parcel of our Party and State's all-embracing concept on the lines of action for solving the fundamental development problems. The steady scoring of an accumulation rate of about 33 percent of the national income all along the last three Five-Year Plans enabled the implementation of vast programs of investments. The Party is firmly guiding the investments activity towards the achievement of highest efficiency indices corresponding to the strategy of Romania's embarking upon a new stage of development; special attention is paid, at the same time, to the most efficient use of all productive capacities.⁹²

Let us have another look at the figures concerning the division between the accumulation fund and consumption fund over the last three five-year plans of the communist period in Romania, i.e. 1976–1980; 1981–1985 and 1986–1989 (unfinished). The structure is the following: (1) Five-Year Plan 1976–1980: 64.0 percent consumption;

⁹² See Manea Mănescu, "Romania's development strategy," *Romania – Pages of History* (Bucharest) No.3–4 (1984), 210, 216.

36.0 percent accumulation; (2) Five-Year Plan 1981–1985: 69.3 percent consumption; 30.7 percent accumulation; and (3) Five-Year Plan 1986–1989: 74.3 percent consumption; 25.7 percent accumulation.⁹³ One can observe that over the three five-year plans considered, the rate of accumulation remained relatively high. Although the accumulation fund decreased from 36 percent of the national income over the 1976–1980 five-year plan to 25.7 percent of the national income over the last five-year plan 1986–1989, it was still far from the lowest value of 17.1 ever recorded during communist rule over the 1956–1960 five-year plan. In spite of the clear signs of social unrest provoked by the deep crisis of the 1980s, the accumulation fund received a significant share of the national income. This also supports the argument that Ceaușescu was not able to adopt more flexible policies in time of crisis as his predecessor, Gheorghiu-Dej, did in the aftermath of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution in order to avoid popular unrest.

Turning back to the international economic context of the 1970s, one should mention that the Western economies entered during that period the fifth industrial age, i.e. the age of electronics and information technology, while the Soviet-type economies were more or less confined to the third industrial age, i.e. the age of steel and organic chemistry.⁹⁴ As Chirot aptly put it: “By the 1970s, the USSR had the world’s most advanced late nineteenth-century economy, the world’s biggest and best, most inflexible rust belt.”⁹⁵ The fifth

⁹³ Mureșan, *Economic evolutions, 1945–1990*, 87.

⁹⁴ According to Daniel Chirot, capitalism went through the following five industrial ages: (1) the cotton-textile age (from the 1780s to the 1830s); (2) the rail and iron age (from the 1840s to the early 1870s); (3) the steel and organic-chemistry age (from the 1870s up to WWI); (4) the age of automobiles and petrochemicals (from the 1910s to the 1970s); and (5) the age of electronics, information, and biotechnology (from the 1970s to the present). See Chirot, “What Happened in Eastern Europe in 1989?” 23.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

industrial age however placed a strong emphasis on the rapid circulation of capital: in the economic realm, speed became crucial.

In communist Romania decisions were made only slowly since almost everything had to be approved at the power elite level, usually by the supreme leader himself. The unusually slow pace of the decision-making process in Ceaușescu's Romania was described by Verdery as follows: "Far from being speeded up, time was being gradually slowed down, flattened, immobilized, and rendered nonlinear."⁹⁶ Thus, the excessive centralization in an age of increasing "time-space compression" contributed significantly to the economic collapse of the communist regime in Romania. The major characteristics of the economic policy enforced by the Party during the period 1977–1989 can be summarized as follows: continuation of the massive investments in heavy industry (steel and iron, heavy machinery); and launch of a series of gigantesque and extremely costly projects such as the Danube – Black Sea Canal and the "systematization" of the capital city Bucharest.

As already mentioned, the power elite in Bucharest pursued in spite of the unfavorable international economic context – most notably the 1973 oil crisis – a policy of massive investments in the heavy industry. Thus, the erection of a new heavy machinery combine (*Combinatul de Utilaj Greu* – CUG) located in the city of Iași began on 31 July 1976. A similar heavy machinery combine, i.e. CUG Cluj-Napoca was erected in the city of Cluj; the first electric furnace at CUG Cluj was put into operation on 30 September 1982. Furthermore, the existing production units were expanded. For instance, the Galați Iron and Steel Complex received a huge, brand new furnace of 2,700 cubic meters which was inaugurated on 7 December 1978. Another furnace, the largest in Romania (3,500 cubic meters), was put into function on 10 February 1981 at the

⁹⁶ Katherine Verdery, "What Was Socialism and Why Did It Fall?" in Tismăneanu, ed., *The Revolutions of 1989*, 80.

same Galați steel combine. Nevertheless, in spite of the massive investments in industry, Romania produced mainly standard goods that sold poorly on the international markets. For instance, the Romanian metallurgical industry produced large quantities of carbon steel, which was not in great demand for export. At the same time, Romania started tardily to produce stainless steel for which demand was high. In this respect, the first experimental batch of stainless steel was produced at the Galați steel combine on 28 April 1982.

Furthermore, in spite of the fact that the crude oil reserves of the country were diminishing rapidly, the investments in the petrochemical industry grew steadily and new installations were built. Thus, a large petrochemical complex was inaugurated in 1979 at Midia-Năvodari, on the Black Sea coast.⁹⁷ The Midia-Năvodari project is particularly telling of the misdirected investment policy of the regime. The petrochemical complex was projected to process crude oil imported on the basis of a bilateral trade agreement with Iran by which Romania was supposed to receive 4 million tons of crude oil yearly in exchange for Romanian-made machinery and equipment. However, in 1979, the same year when the Midia petrochemical complex was inaugurated, an Islamic Revolution took place in Iran, Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi was deposed and the trade agreement was revoked.⁹⁸ Until the end of the communist rule in Romania the Midia-Năvodari petrochemical complex never worked at full capacity. In addition to the Midia-Năvodari complex, new crude oil processing units were erected. For instance, a second refinery – inaugurated on 25 September 1980 – was built at the Borzești Petrochemical Combine.

Relying increasingly on Western credits, Romania imported Western licences in order to produce goods that would boost its exports. For instance, a new French-Romanian joint venture was

⁹⁷ Nedelea, *Romania's history in data*, 294.

⁹⁸ Aldcroft and Morewood, *Economic Change in Eastern Europe since 1918*, 169.

established in the field of car manufacturing in the mid-1970s. The Olcit enterprise was located in the city of Craiova, the capital of the Dolj County, and produced compact cars under a licence from the French manufacturer Citroën.⁹⁹ The outcome of such projects was nevertheless disappointing. Romanian-made industrial consumer goods did not sell well on the international markets. Moreover, some of the products were not fit for the domestic market either. For instance, during the 1980s, the popular demand for the outdated Dacia 1300 model remained high. After a period of fourteen years of “socialist development” which separated the Dacia and Olcit projects, the Romanian population was not in position to afford a relative modern “popular car” like the Olcit. Indeed, the Olcit car was closer to the modern European cars of the time: the engine was compact, equipped with electronic ignition and special transmission belts. At the same time, the Olcit was vulnerable to dust and humidity. Moreover, due to the complexity of its engine, an Olcit had to be repaired only in specialized repair shops. In short, the Olcit was more advanced but smaller, more difficult to maintain, and inappropriate for the low quality of the Romanian roads. As for the Dacia 1300, the “old lady” proved to be all the more fit for everyday use in the conditions of the structural economic crisis of the 1980s. The Dacia car was more spacious, could be repaired by its owner with relative simple means, allowed the use of low quality fuels and permitted the transport of heavy loads on Romania’s terrible roads.

⁹⁹ The Romanian Prime Minister Manea Mănescu held discussions concerning the creation of a joint venture with the French manufacturer Citroën during his visit to France on 14–17 December 1976. On 30 December 1976 it was signed in Bucharest the protocol concerning the creation of the “Olcit” Romanian-French joint venture. The erection of the new plant was started on 17 June 1977 in Craiova and the production of the Olcit automobiles was inaugurated in November 1982. Constantin Voican, “Istoria se scrie sub ochii noștri: Cronologie selectivă extrasă din colecția Scînteii” (History is being written under our eyes: Selective chronology from the Scînteia collection), in *Almanah Scînteia 1978* (Scînteia Almanac 1978) (Bucharest), 115 and Nedelea, *Romania’s history in data*, 321.

Another costly project was the ROMBAC project dedicated to the production of a Romanian commercial airplane under a British licence. The first ROMBAC 1–11 jet-propelled aircraft produced in Romania took off from Bucharest on 28 January 1983 for a domestic flight to Timișoara. The same year, on 23 March, the ROMBAC 1–11 aircraft performed its first international flight from Bucharest Otopeni to London Heathrow.¹⁰⁰ In his propagandistic article quoted above, Mănescu claimed that “by mass-producing the ROMBAC 1–11 Romania became a producer of updated air transport means.”¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, no figures concerning the “mass-production” of the ROMBAC 1–11 commercial airplane were released.

The Romanian case, however, was not singular. In Poland, the Berliet bus plant manufactured a product that required \$ 6,000 imported parts and was not fit for the Polish weather and roads. Moreover, the enterprise produced in 1980 only 1,000 units instead of the planned 5,000.¹⁰² As for the Yugoslav car manufacturer Zastava, its exports into hard currency markets were sold at prices lower than the home prices, which deepened the crisis of state socialism in Yugoslavia.¹⁰³ As Włodzimierz Brus observed, a major problem that the economies of the Soviet bloc countries faced was that the technologies imported from the West served to produce standard goods instead of being a ground for innovation. It was the inability of the state enterprises to assimilate and develop the technologies imported from the West, Brus argues, that led to their poor performances in the field of foreign trade.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Dinu C. Giurescu, ed., *History of Romania in data*, 701–702.

¹⁰¹ Mănescu, “Romania’s development strategy,” 195.

¹⁰² Aldcroft and Morewood, *Economic Change in Eastern Europe since 1918*, 164.

¹⁰³ David F. Good, “The Economic Transformation of Central and Eastern Europe in Historical Perspective: Main Themes and Issues,” in *CEU History Department Yearbook, 1993* (Budapest: CEU, 1994), 195.

¹⁰⁴ Włodzimierz Brus, *Histoire économique de l’Europe de l’Est, 1945–1985* (Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 1986), 322–23.

In the case of Romania, as already noted, during the period under scrutiny a series of gigantic projects of questionable economic efficiency were launched. Of them, the most prominent was the Danube – Black Sea Canal. Although the project was initiated in 1973, the official decision to build the canal was made on 15 April 1976 during a session of the Grand National Assembly. The official inauguration of the canal took place on 27 May 1984. A first attempt at building a canal between the Danube and the Black Sea occurred in the beginning of the communist rule in Romania. Nevertheless, the project that was launched in the summer of 1949 served more as an instrument of repression, i.e. a labor camp for the “enemies of the people,” than for economic purposes. On top of this, technical problems and the lack of the promised Soviet support for the project made impossible its completion. Consequently, the worksite was closed in the summer of 1953.¹⁰⁵

As mentioned above, another gigantic project was the so-called “systematization” of the capital city Bucharest. Ceaușescu’s megalomaniacal plan was to build an entirely new political-administrative complex in downtown Bucharest by razing to the ground a large area – one fifth of the township – around the Unirii Square. As architect Gheorghe Leahu puts it:

The new center, crosswise located on the N-S axis has cut a coarse gap into the radial-concentric layout of the old city. Some of its main thoroughfares come from nowhere to head for nowhere.... During the ten-year period of 1977 through 1987 huge labor and equipment power

¹⁰⁵ The first Danube – Black Sea Canal is remembered primarily as a forced labor camp for political prisoners. The working conditions were so appalling that numerous inmates died a terrible death there. For more on this see Doina Jela, *Cazul Nichita Dumitru: Încercare de reconstituire a unui proces comunist, 29 august – 1 septembrie 1952* (The Nichita Dumitru case: An attempt at re-enacting a communist trial, 29 August – 1 September 1952) (Bucharest: Editura Humanitas, 1995), 25–55.

was guided to tear down large areas of Bucharest, these years remaining for ever a “dark,” highly dramatic age of the history of these places.”¹⁰⁶

A comprehensive analysis of the systematization of Bucharest will go much beyond the limits of the present work. Nevertheless, it should be stressed once again that in terms of the expenditure of funds and human sufferings incurred the project proved to be cataclysmic. The buildings of the State Archives, the Central Military Museum, the “Mina Minovici” Forensic Medicine Institute, the “Republicii” Stadium, the “Brâncovenesc” Hospital, the Institute for Physical Education and Sports, the Operetta Theatre House, as well as hundreds of individual houses were all razed to the ground.¹⁰⁷ Also, between 1977 and 1989 twenty Orthodox churches were torn down and eight moved, i.e. translated on a distance ranging from 12 to 289 meters in Bucharest.¹⁰⁸ As for the long-term consequences, it suffices to say that present day Bucharest still bears the marks of the systematization plan. Obviously, the official propaganda presented the situation in a totally different manner. For instance, in 1989 a Party propagandist characterized the project as a “grandiose oeuvre, fruit of the masterly vision of the general secretary of the

¹⁰⁶ Gheorghe Leahu, *Bucureștiul dispărut* (Vanished Bucharest) (Bucharest: Editura Arta Grafică, 1995), 116. See also the map at page 187.

¹⁰⁷ The major work on Ceaușescu’s systematization plan, including the project of rural systematization, remains Dinu C. Giurescu, *Distrugerea trecutului României* (The Razing of Romania’s Past) (Bucharest: Editura Museion, 1994). First published as *The Razing of Romania’s Past* (Washington DC: The Preservation Press, 1989).

¹⁰⁸ For a detailed presentation of the respective churches and the way in which they were demolished or translated to a nearby location see Lidia Anania et al., *Bisericile osîndite de Ceaușescu* (The churches doomed by Ceaușescu) (Bucharest: Editura Anastasia, 1995). A concise description of the respective churches is to be found in the tables at pp. 202–206 and 206–209.

Party and his love for the capital city in which he grew up as an astute revolutionary.”¹⁰⁹

There was also an unexpected event that, apart from the misdirected investments and rigid economic policies, put a supplementary burden on the economy of the country after 1977: the terrible earthquake of 4 March 1977. Also, one should note that Ceaușescu’s project to tear down and rebuild the center of Bucharest was in many respects inspired by the fact that a majority of the blocks that crumbled during the earthquake had been built during the interwar period. The consequences of the earthquake have been disastrous: the number of victims amounted to 1,570 people killed and 9,300 injured. Moreover, the housing sector was seriously hit: 156,000 flats in urban areas and 21,500 dwellings in rural areas were destroyed or severely damaged. Another 336,000 flats in urban areas and 117,000 dwellings in rural areas had to be consolidated. According to Romanian estimates, the earthquake of 4 March 1977 provoked a total loss of five percent of Romania’s GNP and incurred overall costs of over 2 billion U.S. dollars.¹¹⁰

Finally, it should be mentioned that it was one ample project developed after 1977 that deserves a closer attention: the erection of the Cernavodă nuclear power plant. Ceaușescu wanted to avoid at all costs Romania’s dependence on Soviet technologies and this made possible the erection of a CANDU-type nuclear power plant based on Canadian technology near the town of Cernavodă, in Dobrogea.¹¹¹ The Romanian-Canadian protocol in the field of nuclear energy was

¹⁰⁹ See Panait I. Panait, “Călătorie în timp prin București” (Travel in time through Bucharest), in *Almanah Știința 1989* (Știința Almanac 1989) (Bucharest), 44–61. The passage cited is at page 58.

¹¹⁰ Tsantis and Pepper, *Romania*, 390–91. See also Luminița Moroianu, *Catastrofa anunțată* (A foreshadowed catastrophe), *Ziua* (20 January 2003); available from <http://www.ziua.net>; Internet; accessed 20 January 2003.

¹¹¹ It is about a nuclear power plant of Canadian design using deuterium oxide as moderator and natural uranium as fuel.

signed in Bucharest on 16 December 1978. The CANDU-type nuclear power plant was not only adapted to the needs of a country like Romania – in terms of size and level of development, but it was also much more secure than the Soviet model adopted by other communist countries such as Bulgaria or former Czechoslovakia. These characteristics proved to be all the more important in the aftermath of the Chernobyl – now in Ukraine, northwest of the capital city Kiev – nuclear catastrophe of 16 April 1986. It is also worth mentioning that Romania was the only Soviet-bloc country that decided not to import Soviet nuclear technology for producing electrical power.

Although the first signs of a deep economic crisis already appeared in the mid-1970s, it was in 1979 that the regime introduced price increases for gasoline, electricity, natural gas and heating fuel. Ceaușescu, who wanted to diminish Romania's dependence on the West, engaged in a policy of reducing country's external debt, which in late 1981 amounted to some \$ 10.2 billion and in 1982 reached a record amount of approx. \$ 13 billion.¹¹² At the Plenum of the CC of the RCP held on 12–14 April 1989 Ceaușescu would proudly announce that Romania concluded the payment of its external debt. Nevertheless, it is still difficult to explain why the regime did not allot a larger share of the national income to consumption in order to raise the living standards of the population after April 1989, all the more that the communist secret police, the infamous Securitate, provided timely and accurate reports regarding the growing potential for protests “from below.” Especially in 1989, the power cuts and food shortages contributed heavily in deepening the frustration felt by a majority of the population in Romania.

As already noted, in terms of industrial consumer goods Romanian exports were less competitive. As a consequence, in its quest for hard currency revenues, the Party decided to augment the exports of

¹¹² Georgescu, *The Romanians*, 270.

agricultural products simultaneously with a drastic reduction of imports. Thus, beginning in 1981–1982 Romania, which used to import foodstuffs from the West on a regular basis, entered a period of chronic shortages. Food rationing measures followed shortly: in 1981, bread rationing was introduced in order to limit consumption and was maintained over the entire 1981–1989 period, except for the capital city Bucharest. Similar measures of food rationing were introduced for other basic foodstuffs, such as cooking oil and sugar. In the face of the alimentary crisis, instead of taking radical measures in order to increase production the regime issued a so-called “Program of scientific alimentation of the population” (*Programul de alimentație științifică a populației*), which was published on 14 July 1982.¹¹³ Such a program was meant to obscure the real causes of the crisis, i.e. the mistaken economic policy enforced by the Party, and suggest that the shortages were due to a tendency of overeating among the population at large. As a consequence, severe shortages of foodstuffs and other basic things, such as soap, toothpaste and detergent occurred.

Queuing for food became a daily routine. A person who went through the experience of queuing for food recalls: “The stores that had no queue in front of them were empty. The most important queues started to form at night or at the break of dawn, especially for ‘chicken’ (claws, neck, head and wings) or cheese and eggs. The maximum quantity that a buyer could ask for was one kilo of cheese and thirty eggs.”¹¹⁴ Children could not be spared: they had to stay in line and buy their share of foodstuff in order to help their families. A witness account is telling of the situation created:

Although I was just a child, I remember perfectly the horror of the interminable, awfully suffocating queues, to which we, the children,

¹¹³ Nedelea, *Romania's history in data*, 318.

¹¹⁴ Account by Grigore Olimp Ioan published in *Martor* (Witness) – *The Review of Anthropology of the Museum of the Romanian Peasant* (Bucharest) No.7 (2002), 132. Hereafter quoted as *Martor*.

often participated.... I remember these things with amusement, but our parents experienced them with pain. They had to torture their children, watching them squeezed by people, so that they could lay breakfast on the table for the following week.¹¹⁵

Gasoline was also rationed. In order to reduce traffic, the regime devised all sorts of administrative measures, such as banning the circulation of private automobiles during winter. The regime also imposed a measure meant to reduce traffic: people could drive their cars only every other Sunday, in accordance with the registration number – odd or even – of their car. Those who could afford used to have two cars, one with an even registration number and the other with an odd one. A majority of the population, however, could not keep two cars. In spite of rationing and the administrative measures introduced in order to restrict traffic, people were determined to drive their cars. Driving your car was also a political gesture. Queuing for gasoline was another humiliating experience and numerous witness accounts tell how difficult it was for ordinary people to get some extra gasoline. Nevertheless, some gasoline-related stories, like the following one, are tragicomic:

There was a law that forbade car traffic in winter, from the first snowfall until March. In the provinces they established a fixed quota, 20 liters of gasoline a month. The town officials managed to get some extra coupons. In Bucharest we had a right to 4 reservoirs. You were appointed to a certain gas station where they marked you off every time you filled your reservoir.... In August or September 1983 I went on a trip to the monasteries in Moldavia. I took with me 4 cans of gasoline. On the road between Sf. Gheorghe and Braşov I came upon a funeral convoy that was blocked on the way. The driver was waving and making signs that they had run out of fuel, and could not move to take the dead man to his grave. I gave him 10 liters.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Account by Ana-Maria Bucium, *Martor*, 134.

¹¹⁶ Account by Puiu Gheorghiu, *Martor*, 77.

Apart from gasoline, natural gas became an issue. During the 1980s, for those who lived in blocks of flats the pressure of the natural gas delivered to the cooking machines was so low during the day that it was impossible to cook. As a consequence, there were many those who prepared their food overnight, when the gas pressure was higher. In general, some preferred to cook early in the morning, from 4 a.m. to 7 a.m., while others stayed after 11 p.m.¹¹⁷ However, not everybody was connected to the natural gas pipelines. Thus, many were forced to rely on gas cylinders to fuel their cooking machines and consequently queuing for natural gas was another frustrating experience, as the following account indicates:

There was true wrestling in the lines for gas cylinders. There was a time when you could practically die in there. I for one was almost in for it once. When the truck came to unload the goods, all previous priority lists were ignored and people crowded in, trampling on one's another feet for fear someone else might steal their gas cylinder from under their nose.... That was because there were never enough gas cylinders.¹¹⁸

In 1982 electricity price rose with 30 percent, while the heating fuel rose almost 300 percent.¹¹⁹ Although the private electricity consumption represented only 7.0 percent of the total consumption, during the 1980s, the population had to bear the burden of energy crisis. This provoked major difficulties in central heating during wintertime, which had appalling long-term consequences for state of health of the population. A witness account speaks of the terrible situation during those winters of mid-1980s:

Heating was a hellish business back then. The majority of the Bucharest lodgings were connected to thermal power stations. The heating was extremely weak, there was no gas, and people lived for years beneath 10

¹¹⁷ Account by Ioana Monj, *Martor*, 74.

¹¹⁸ Account by Ilie Filip, *Martor*, 75.

¹¹⁹ Shafir, *Romania – Politics, Economics and Society*, 118.

degrees Celsius. There was no heating source. No heat at home, no heat at work, no heat in shops. People suffered from cold, many fell sick. We kept our long coats on when at work. I kept one permanently at my work place. *I saw people fall ill and die with cold. It was appalling* [emphasis added].¹²⁰

Such a situation made some Party old-timers such as sociologist Pavel Câmpeanu to protest publicly against the irrational energy-rationing policies of the regime. Câmpeanu's petition addressed to Ceaușescu on 11 January 1988 is a severe indictment of the drastic restrictions imposed on the deliveries of electricity and natural gas for the population, as well as a sobering analysis of their long-term effects on the well being of the population.¹²¹ Thus, it may be argued that in the late 1980s for the major part of the Romanian population the conditions of life were at the lowest level among the communist countries in East-Central Europe, with the possible exception of Albania. Furthermore, it is reasonable to affirm that the high potential for protest of ordinary people was directly linked to the miseries of everyday life.

It took however some years until the profound dissatisfaction of the population with the Ceaușescu regime was publicly expressed by the angered crowds of urban dwellers that joined the revolted workers in the city of Brașov on 15 November 1987. The confession of a 1987 protester who stormed the Party headquarters in Brașov is also telling with respect to the quality of life of the ordinary people at the time: "When I entered an office [located in the Party building] I saw a pineapple for the first time in my life."¹²² Similar testimonies

¹²⁰ Account by M.B., *Martor*, 81.

¹²¹ The complete text of the petition is provided in Câmpeanu, *Ceaușescu, the countdown years*, 279–87.

¹²² See the confession of Marian Ricu in Marius Oprea and Stejărel Olaru, eds., *Ziua care nu se uită: 15 noiembrie 1987, Brașov* (The day one cannot forget: 15 November 1987, Brașov) (Iași: Editura Polirom, 2002), 49.

abound. One of them, however, expresses in few words the feelings of those who revolted: "We were working like slaves and had nothing to eat."¹²³ A critical intellectual, mathematician Mihai Botez, reached in 1989 an appalling conclusion with regard to the dire consequences of the economic policies enforced by the regime:

*According to my estimates, between 15,000 and 20,000 people are dying each year in Romania due to the shortages of food, the lack of heating, bad transportation, etc. [emphasis added]. The situation is not exactly a joke. Living in Romania is like living in a concentration camp. The economic disaster has had major consequences for the social, political and cultural environment of Romania.*¹²⁴

That the economic situation in Romania in the late 1980s was disastrous and the agriculture devastated one could also grasp from the first communiqué of the National Salvation Front (NSF) issued on 22 December 1989. At point four the NSF proposed: "To restructure the whole national economy in accordance with the criteria of profitability and efficiency. To eliminate the administrative, bureaucratic methods of centralized economic management and to promote free initiative and competence in management of all economic sectors." As for the agriculture, point five of the NSF communiqué proposed: "To restructure agriculture and to assist the small scale peasant production. To halt the destruction of villages."¹²⁵

If one applies the theory of short-term setbacks to the Romanian case the situation in the late 1980s can be explained as follows. A "golden period" of higher consumption and rising expectations

¹²³ Confession of Aurel Buceanu, *ibid.*, 52.

¹²⁴ See "Romania: A Case of 'Dynastic' Communism," in *Perspectives on Freedom No. 11* (New York: Freedom House, 1989), 34.

¹²⁵ For excerpts translated into English from the NSF communiqué of 22 December 1989 see Robert V. Daniels, ed., *A Documentary History of Communism and the World: From Revolution to Collapse* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1994), 345–46. The passages quoted are at page 345.

(1964–1977) was followed by a period of crisis and decline of the living standards of the population (1977–1989), which led to a rise of the societal dissatisfaction with the regime and finally to the December 1989 upheaval. It should be stressed however that this explains the general explosion of fury after the Ceaușescu couple fled from the CC building on 22 December 1989 at noon. Nevertheless, in order to explain the sparking of the 1989 revolution in Romania one has to examine the conjunctural and nation-specific factors as well.

Turning back to issue of rising expectations, it should be stressed that in terms of popular perceptions the regime was generally perceived as having offered something to the Romanian society during the period 1964–1977, i.e. a reasonable standard of living. By the late 1980s, however, as a direct result of the mistaken policies enforced by the regime, a strange phenomenon occurred. As historian Vlad Georgescu perceptively observed: “Under the guise of austerity, the regime imposed on the country an almost bizarre process of demodernization.”¹²⁶ The same author also provides a shocking picture of the Romanian society in the late 1980s:

The media constantly appealed to the peasants to replace mechanical with manual work, and to use carts and horses instead of trucks and tractors. Commercial firms were advised to transport merchandise on tricycles. The use of refrigerators and washing machines was officially discouraged and restricted, and coal irons and oil lamps were recommended as energy savers, in preference to electrical appliances. In a state that produced cars but banned driving, built housing developments but withheld heat and running water, announced that it had harvested the biggest grain crop in history but put its people on meager bread rations, this paradoxical turning back of the clock belied the outward forms of modernization and exposed their lack of content.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Georgescu, *The Romanians*, 272.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

Absolute deprivation was a primary source of hatred towards the regime. Scholars have employed syntagms such as “queuing for food” (Pavel Câmpeanu) or “etatization of time” (Katherine Verdery), which capture well the way in which absolute deprivation had a significant contribution to the collapse of the regime. One should bear in mind that in the late 1980s a majority of the population was forced to think in terms of biological survival. Moreover, the profound sense of powerlessness proved to be one of the most terrible experiences of the 1980s. As Verdery aptly puts it:

The experience of humiliation, of a destruction of dignity, was common to those who had waited for hours to accomplish (or fail to accomplish) some basic task. Being immobilized for some meager return, during which time one could not do anything else one might find rewarding, was the ultimate experience of impotence.¹²⁸

In a similar vein, it may be argued that relative deprivation/dissatisfaction played an important role in the development of discontent. In the Romanian case, relative discontent was generated not only by the sharp division in terms of social identities, i.e., the division between “us” (population) and “them” (nomenklatura), but also by the comparison between Romania and the “fraternal” countries which were better off. Paradoxically, the incipient Titoism of the late Gheorghiu-Dej period (1962–1965) initiated the process of rising expectations that his successor, Ceaușescu, was compelled to pursue during the period of collective leadership (1965–1968).

Until consolidating his power and gaining control over the party, Ceaușescu did follow the policies enforced by Gheorghiu-Dej. Beginning in 1969 and especially after the Eleventh Congress of the RCP in 1974, Ceaușescu pursued only Gheorghiu-Dej’s policy of

¹²⁸ Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 56.

independence from Moscow but failed to adopt more flexible policies in the economic realm. Thus, Ceaușescu fatally neglected or misinterpreted a crucial element characteristic of the political strategy of his predecessor, which could have saved his life in December 1989. Although not an economic reformer – as Bărlădeanu rightly asserted – Gheorghiu-Dej favored towards the end of his rule an economic policy based on prudent reforms. For his part, Ceaușescu was inflexible and unimaginative. In 1973, enthroned as the uncontested leader of the Party, he stated emphatically: “In the next ten to fifteen years we are called upon to do away completely with the lagging behind which we have inherited, to raise the Romanian people on to a high level of economic, scientific and cultural development, to ensure them a superior standard of living.”¹²⁹ Within sixteen years of stating the above, the economy of the country was devastated and the standard of living of the population plummeted. Also, within sixteen years of stating the above Ceaușescu himself was dead, executed by a revolutionary regime. At the same time, the story of the demise of communism in Romania is much more complicated. Economic failure alone cannot explain why the communist regime in Romania survived until the end of 1989 and was only the last in a row to collapse among the communist regimes in ECE. In other words, economic failure cannot explain the place Romania occupies within the 1989 sequence of collapse. In order to explain the issue of timing, one has to concentrate on the conjunctural and nation-specific factors.

¹²⁹ Quoted in Costin Murgescu, *Romania's Socialist Economy*, 77.

Ideological Decay

Ideological decay or the erosion of ideology was a phenomenon that other communist regimes in ECE experienced after Nikita Khrushchev presented his “secret report” to the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU on the night of 24–25 February 1956.¹³⁰ Some authors, such as Leszek Kołakowski, have argued that Khrushchev’s campaign of de-Stalinization meant the “the moral ruin of communism.” According to Kołakowski, Khrushchev’s exposure of the abuses committed by Stalin represented a true ideological shock: “The Stalinist regime could not exist without the cement of ideology to legitimize party rule, and the party apparatus at this time was sensitive to ideological shocks.... De-Stalinization proved to be a virus from which Communism never recovered.”¹³¹ The “secret speech” in which the Soviet communist leader attacked Stalin’s personality cult did have a major impact on the communist regimes in Poland and Hungary. Actually, the utopian goal of building radically new societies throughout Sovietized Europe received a definitive blow with the sparking of the Hungarian Revolution in October 1956. As for Romania, it may be argued that an ideology that never appealed to the Romanian society simply could not enter a process of decay. Nevertheless, although Marxism-Leninism never truly appealed to the Romanian society at large, the regime was able to make use of nationalism as an ideological substitute which, especially from 1968 onwards, served as ideological “cement” for the Romanian ethnic majority and legitimized the RCP rule.

¹³⁰ For the complete text of Khrushchev’s “secret speech” see Bertram D. Wolfe, *Khrushchev and Stalin’s Ghost: Text, Background and Meaning of Khrushchev’s Secret Report to the Twentieth Congress on the Night of February 24–25, 1956* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1957).

¹³¹ Leszek Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, vol. 3, *The Breakdown* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978; reprint, 1990), 453.

A brief survey of the history of the communist movement in Romania is however necessary in order to understand better the context in which Marxism-Leninism was replaced by nationalism as an ideological instrument for legitimating the RCP rule. Speaking of the Romanian political system at the end of World War II, Trond Gilberg correctly observed: "The communists had no future in Romania. They could only hope to obtain power through extraordinary circumstances, and, by the same token, maintain themselves in power by means of force or by redefining Marxism in their own image, tradition, and culture. This they did."¹³² A detailed analysis of the development of the socialist ideas in the Old Kingdom and later on in Greater Romania would go much beyond the scope of this chapter. What is important for the present discussion is that, at the moment of the communist takeover, the socialist and communist parties in Romania virtually lacked popular support as compared to the traditional ("historical") political parties.

In fact, the Romanian socialists were campaigning for a "virtually non-existent class," as Constantin Stere perceptively argued.¹³³ Socialism was actually an alien ideology with little impact on the overwhelmingly peasant population of the country. This was made clear by the "founding father" of the Romanian socialism, Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea, who wrote in 1894 in a letter to Karl Kautsky that the word "socialism" was not even known in Romania when he had arrived in the country as a Russian refugee.¹³⁴ According to Shafir, the frailty of the Romanian socialist movement was determined by three major factors: (1) the socio-economic structure of Romanian economy, i.e. the "eminently agrarian" character of the country; (2) the "non-Romanian ethnic origin" of many socialist and communist

¹³² Trond Gilberg, *Nationalism and Communism in Romania: The Rise and Fall of Ceausescu's Personal Dictatorship* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990), 34.

¹³³ Cited in Shafir, *Romania – Politics, Economics and Society*, 13.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

leaders; and (3) the “disregard displayed by the Romanian Communist Party towards traditional national aspirations.”¹³⁵ The lack of audience within society also led to a series of internal conflicts and ruptures that marked the Romanian socialist movement until its demise in the aftermath of the communist takeover.¹³⁶ Founded in 1893, the Romanian Social Democratic Workers Party (RSDWP) dissolved in 1899, when a large faction of the RSDWP joined the much stronger Liberal Party, an event known as the “treason of the Generous.”¹³⁷ The “treason of the Generous” had a devastating, long-lasting effect on the development of Romanian socialism. Due to the said “treason,” the party was re-organized only in February 1910.

The Bolshevik Revolution represented a watershed in the history of socialist movement in Romania. Archival sources published after 1989 reveal that the Bolshevik propaganda in Romania gained momentum well before the October Revolution. The authorities were concerned with the activity of the Romanian socialists and the Secret Service (the Siguranță) closely watched them. For instance, a report of the Siguranță dated 13 April 1917 refers to the contacts between the Romanian Socialists and Russian Bolsheviks camped in the city of Iași and surroundings.¹³⁸ On 18 April/1 May 1918, the

¹³⁵ Shafir, *Romania – Politics, Economics and Society*, 9.

¹³⁶ “The Romanian socialist movement – Shafir argues – was plagued by constant rifts, schisms and re-alliances.” Shafir, *Romania – Politics, Economics and Society*, 28.

¹³⁷ Nicolae Jurca, *Istoria social-democrației din România* (History of Romanian Social Democracy) (Bucharest: Editura Științifică, 1994), 42–47. See also Robert Levy, *Ana Pauker: The Rise and Fall of a Jewish Communist* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 35.

¹³⁸ See “Raport al Siguranței Generale referitor la contacte dintre socialiștii români și soldați ruși bolșevizați, cantonați în Iași și în împrejurimi” (Report of the *Siguranță* concerning the contacts between Romanian and Bolshevized Russian soldiers camped in the city of Iași and surroundings), in Florian Tănăsescu et al., eds, *Ideologie și structuri comuniste în România, 1917–1918: Documente* (Ideology and communist structures in Romania, 1917–1918: Documents) (Bucharest: INST, 1995), 217–20.

Russian soldiers in Iași participated to a large demonstration that led to the release of two radical socialist militants sentenced to house arrest: Cristian Rakovski (1873–1941) and Mihail Gheorghiu Bujor (1881–1964).¹³⁹ One should also note that, between World War I and World War II, the increased pace of industrialization boosted the process of “making” the Romanian working class. Although the exact figures are difficult to calculate, it can be stated that the Romanian working class numbered around 400,000 persons in 1938. These circumstances proved to be favorable for the socialist movement, which experienced a revival. However, the issue of the affiliation to the Comintern sparked a heated debate, which ultimately led to a major schism within the socialist movement and opened the way for the creation of the Romanian Communist Party. An open conflict among the Romanian socialists erupted already in February 1921, but it was only after the congress of 8–13 May 1921 that the movement split. Subsequently, a radical faction, the “maximalists,” who opted for the affiliation to the Comintern, founded the Romanian Communist Party (RCP).

The congress of 8–13 May 1921 became the First Congress of the RCP. During the interwar period, the RCP held another four congresses, as follows: on 3–4 October 1922 (the Second Congress); August 1924 (the Third Congress, held in Vienna); 28 June – 7 July 1928 (the Fourth Congress, held in Kharkov); and 3 – 24 December

¹³⁹ It is still unclear if the release of the two radical socialist militants was part of a plan to Sovietize Romania beginning in the spring-summer of 1917. Nevertheless, subsequent to their release, both militants engaged in a sustained Bolshevik propaganda in the Odessa region. On the release of Rakovski and Bujor see “Raport al Serviciului Siguranței din Marele Cartier General privind manifestația soldaților ruși de la Iași cu prilejul zilei de 18 aprilie (1 mai), în timpul căreia au fost eliberați C. Rakovski și M. Gh. Bujor” (Report of the Siguranță concerning the demonstration of the Russian soldiers in Iași to celebrate 18 April/1 May during which C. Rakovski and M. Gh. Bujor were released), in Tănăsescu et al., eds., *Ideology and communist structures in Romania, 1917–1918*, 221–24.

1931 (the Fifth Congress, held nearby Moscow).¹⁴⁰ The Party's lack of adherents during the interwar period was also related to the acceptance by the RCP of the Cominternist theses stating that Romania was an "imperialistic state," created "by occupation of foreign territories," which "exploited the oppressed peoples." Actually, apart from slogans the RCP had no practical solutions for the problems Romania was facing at the time. For instance, in the end of the Fifth RCP Congress (1931), Elena Filipovici stated:

The Fifth Congress of the RCP gives us the just line and five fundamental slogans: [1] against the fascist dictatorship; [2] the 8-hour workday; [3] land to the peasants; [4] self-determination up to secession; [5] the defense of USSR. These slogans must be the lighthouse for our struggle and teach us that the everyday struggle must be transformed into a struggle at a higher level, for conquering power and thus concluding the bourgeois-democratic revolution.¹⁴¹

The identity-shaping experiences of the Romanian communist militants during the interwar period led to the development of the two most cherished political values of the communist movement in Romania, i.e. *monolithism* and *emancipation*. Although these aspects are discussed at length in the chapter on nation-specific factors, it is important to mention that *emancipation* proved to be the crucial element that permitted the use of nationalism as an ideological substitute for Marxism-Leninism during the late Gheorghiu-Dej and the entire Ceaușescu periods. Throughout the interwar period, the Party was compelled to follow unabatedly the orders coming from the Kremlin and this led to a profound political marginalization of the communist militants during that period. The RCP propaganda

¹⁴⁰ For more on the interwar policies of the RCP see Mircea Mușat and Ion Ardeleanu, *România după Marea Unire 1918–1933* (Romania after the Great Unification 1918–1933) vol. II (Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1986), 170–206 and 594–641.

¹⁴¹ Quoted in Mușat and Ardeleanu, *Romania after the Great Unification*, 640.

had little success in reaching the hearts and minds of the overwhelming majority of the population of Greater Romania since the Party militated, as far as ethnic minorities were concerned, for “self-determination up to secession” – as Elena Filipovici put it. In terms of leadership, the RCP had during the period 1922–1944 only one general secretary of Romanian ethnic origin, Gheorghe Cristescu (1922–1924), while all the others were of non-Romanian ethnic origin: Elek Köblos (1924–1928); Vitali Holostenko (1928–1931); Aleksandr Danieluk Stefanski (1931–1934); Boris Stefanov (1934–1940) and Ștefan Foriș (1940–1944). For the purpose of the argument developed in this section it is worth mentioning the ethnic origin of those RCP general secretaries: Holostenko was Ukrainian, Stefanski was Polish, Stefanov was Bulgarian and Foriș was a Hungarian from Romania.¹⁴² Such a situation created a deep frustration among the ethnic Romanian members of the Party, whose salience could be grasped from witness accounts, testimonies and even Party documents long after the local communists took control over the Party in the postwar period.

The socialist movement in Romania started to grow effectively beginning in 1937, when the Social-Democratic Party united with the Unitary Socialist Party.¹⁴³ However, the events that followed shortly – the institution of royal dictatorship of King Carol II, the break out of World War II, the establishment of the military dictatorship of general Ion Antonescu and finally the communist takeover – hampered the development of what might be called an “authentic left” in Romanian politics. As for the communists, in 1944 the RCP emerged from the underground as a group of militants that amounted to some 1,000 members. Consequently the support of the

¹⁴² Florin Constantiniu, *P.C.R., Pătrășcanu și Transilvania, 1945–1946* (RCP, Pătrășcanu and Transylvania, 1945–46) (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2001), 34.

¹⁴³ Jurca, *History of Romanian Social Democracy*, 246–47. See also Shafir, *Romania – Politics, Economics and Society*, 28–29.

Red Army was of paramount importance in bringing the Romanian communists to power after the coup of 23 August 1944. This is why the official propaganda never addressed the issue of the RCP membership in 1944. Ceaușescu, for instance, spoke of the RCP membership in 1945, not in 1944, and claimed that the Party had 20,000–25,000 “well versed activists” at the time.¹⁴⁴

Simply put, without the catastrophic consequences of World War II and the subsequent Soviet occupation of the country there would have been no communist regime in Romania. It is another question as to how Moscow influenced the coming to power of the local communists in Romania. As already noted, Gheorghiu-Dej and his men did not come to power with a precise economic or social agenda. At stake was the political survival of a small and marginal group of militants, totally dependent on the Red Army that brought it to power. Furthermore, what characterized the postwar history of the RWP/RCP was a ruthless struggle for power and not a debate over the main tenets of Marxism-Leninism and the way they had to be put into practice in Romania. Ideology never stayed at the core of the debates within the inner circle of power. In fact, the Soviet tanks

¹⁴⁴ Quoted in *Istoria patriei și a Partidului Comunist Român în opera Președintelui Nicolae Ceaușescu* (History of the Motherland and the Romanian Communist Party reflected in the work of President Nicolae Ceaușescu) (Bucharest: Editura Militară, 1979), 369. Actually, none of the propagandistic works tackled the problem of RCP membership in 1944. See, for instance, the collection of excerpts from Ceaușescu’s speeches concerning the history of the RCP entitled: *Partidul Comunist Român – continuator al luptei revoluționare și democratice a poporului român, al tradițiilor înaintate ale mișcării muncitorești și socialiste* (RCP – continuator of the revolutionary and democratic struggle of the Romanian people, of the advanced traditions of the workers’ and socialist movement) (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1972), 87–125. See also Ilie Ceaușescu, “Partidul Comunist Român – moștenitorul autentic al tradițiilor luptei întregului popor pentru apărarea patriei,” in Nicolae Petreanu and Ștefan Lache, eds., *Contribuții la studierea istoriei contemporane a României* (Contributions to the study of Romania’s contemporary history) (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1980), 230–43.

brought to power *not* an ideology, but a small group composed of Gheorghiu-Dej and his “group from prisons” that made use of Stalinist methods – aiming gradually at Stalin’s “terroristic despotism,” to quote Robert C. Tucker – in order to establish and perpetuate a dictatorship. As Tucker puts it: “Those communist parties that acquired power in the aftermath of the Second World War, in most cases under conditions of Red Army occupation of their countries, presided over internal revolutionary processes which involved the forcible transplantation of Soviet Communism in its highly Russified Stalinist form.”¹⁴⁵

Soon after the imposition of the communist rule in Romania it became clear that to “struggle for communism” was by no means the ideal of a majority of the population. The elections of 19 November 1946, in which the so-called “historical,” that is, traditional and democratic parties won a majority of the vote. The vote however was reversed afterwards in favor of the communists and their allies, but the fact remains that the major part of the population did not support the communists and their allies. As historian Dinu C. Giurescu has demonstrated, democratic parties won a majority of the votes in the elections of November 1946, but the results were falsified in favor of the so-called Bloc of Democratic Parties (*Blocul Partidelor Democratice* – BPD) led by the RCP. The BPD was established on 17 May 1946 and was composed of the RCP and other five parties that fully supported its policies. Although numerous irregularities intended to influence the vote in favor of the BPD were recorded, the BPD actually received only 33 percent of the votes at the country level. Moreover, Giurescu suggests that, in the absence of such irregularities and discrimination against the democratic “historical” parties, the votes for the BPD would not have exceeded 20 percent of the total.

¹⁴⁵ Robert C. Tucker, “Stalinism and Comparative Communism,” in idem, ed., *Stalinism: Essays in Historical Interpretation* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1977), xviii-xix.

According to the official data, however, BPD got 83.81 percent of the total vote.¹⁴⁶ It is therefore reasonable to suggest that the masses had little faith in the utopian dream of building a radically new society in Romania. Again, this does not mean that nobody believed in the “dream of a utopia where the masses were free and managed everything on their own initiative,” to use the inspired words of Wolfe.¹⁴⁷ Deep social, economic, and ethnic cleavages did exist in interwar Romania and many hoped in a change for the better in the immediate postwar period. A majority of the population, however, was simply not convinced that the communists would be able to achieve it.

As for the post-World War II communist elite, the initial utopian dreams were replaced quickly by a ruthless power struggle. The “true believers,” antifascists that joined the communist movement during the “illegality period,” that is, the underground years, were slowly marginalized after the takeover. Many were marginalized because of their ethnicity, especially those of Jewish origin.¹⁴⁸ Those who fought in the Spanish Civil War – the “Spaniards,” as well as the French Resistance veterans were primarily targeted beginning in the autumn of 1952. With regard to the ethnicity of the Spanish Civil War veterans, Robert Levy observed that “at least two-thirds of the Spaniards, and perhaps as many as four-fifths of them, were Jews.”¹⁴⁹

The year 1956 proved to be poisonous for the communist movement. The “secret report” by which Khrushchev denounced the “excesses” of the late Soviet dictator – the “crimes of the Stalin era”

¹⁴⁶ Dinu C. Giurescu, “Documente privind ‘alegerile’ din 1946” (Documents concerning the ‘elections’ of 1946), in *Centenar Constantin C. Giurescu* (Centennial Constantin C. Giurescu) (Craiova: Editura Universitaria, 2001), 313–24.

¹⁴⁷ Wolfe, “Marxism and the Russian Revolution,” in idem, *An Ideology in Power*, 30.

¹⁴⁸ Câmpeanu, *Ceaușescu, the countdown years*, 180–195.

¹⁴⁹ Levy, *Ana Pauker*, 160.

– frightened deeply the power elite in Bucharest. Furthermore, the outbreak of the Hungarian revolution demonstrated that totalitarian ideology undeniably lost its strength or, to use Andrzej Walicki's inspired words, communism ceased to represent a "unifying Final Goal."¹⁵⁰ In Hungary, in the aftermath of the 1956 revolution, the traditional symbolism regarding the mission of the communist party to construct a utopian new society had to be abandoned in favor of an unwritten social contract. Ideology ceased to be a driving force in the relationship between the regime and the Hungarian society; it was, instead, the issue of stability and economic performance that the regime skillfully utilized in order to avoid a new 1956-like trauma and to pursue consensus.¹⁵¹

The Hungarian Revolution also influenced the Stalinist regime in neighboring Romania. For its part, the Romanian Stalinist elite led by Gheorghiu-Dej saw in the Hungarian Revolution an unexpected chance to display its apparent support for Khrushchev's policies and eventually escape de-Stalinization. Yet, Stalinism was constrained to evolve in Romania as well, but not in the sense of returning to the "Leninist norms" of collective decision-making envisaged by Khrushchev. To survive politically, the Stalinist elite in Bucharest returned gradually and cautiously to the traditional local values. Apparently highly ideological, the debates within the RWP/RCP were actually meant to preserve the unity of the party around its supreme leader. Monolithism and emancipation – the

¹⁵⁰ Andrzej Walicki, *Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom: The Rise and Fall of the Communist Utopia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 517.

¹⁵¹ Writing about the Hungarian society during the 1980s, Kornai wonderfully put it: "In Hungary, 20–25 years after a defeated revolution, the attention of the leading stratum and the millions of ordinary people turned not towards strikes and political struggles, but calmly towards economy. Ordinary people chased around after extra earnings, built houses and grew vegetables." János Kornai, *Evolution of the Hungarian Economy, 1848–1998; Volume II: Paying the Bill for Goulash-Communism* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 2000), 131.

already traditional values of the communist movement in Romania – were translated into a policy of independence-cum-industrialization that eventually legitimized the Party in the eyes of the population.

It is highly questionable that an “old-timers’ dissidence” was about to emerge within the RCP in the mid-1950s. An episode that has been invoked as a proof of an incipient factionalism was the June 1958 purge of a group of old-timers, former railway fellow workers of Gheorghiu-Dej. During a Plenum of the RWP held on 9–13 June 1958 it was “unveiled” the alleged “anti-Party,” “factional” activity of a group of old-timers composed of: Constatin Doncea, Ovidiu Șandru, Grigore Răceanu, Eugen Genad, Heinrich Genad, Ion Drancă, Constantin Moflic, Pavel Ștefan, Vasile Bîgu, Vasile Negoită, and Iacob Coțoveanu. The enumeration of those purged follows the enumeration in the original report to the Plenum, read by Nicolae Ceaușescu on 10 June 1958.¹⁵² As recent scholarship indicates, the old-timers were not attempting at organizing on ideological grounds a dissident faction within the Party: they were rather mumbling against the new configuration of the Party elite shepherded by Gheorghiu-Dej in which they had become marginal.¹⁵³ In any case, the unsophisticated mindset of many of those purged would have not recommended them as an “enlightened” alternative to Gheorghiu-Dej and his men.

Nevertheless, a small group of what might be called true believers remained within the RWP/RCP. Marginalized and frustrated, their disillusionment with the policies of Gheorghiu-Dej and Ceaușescu should not be denied. Some even dared to speak out. For instance,

¹⁵² For the indictment and the measures taken against the “anti-Party” faction and those who allegedly supported, or failed to inform on, them see Alina Tudor and Dan Cătănuș, eds., *Amurgul ilegalităților: Plenara PMR din 9–13 iunie 1958* (The sunset of the old-timers: The RWP Plenum of 9–13 June 1958) (Bucharest: Editura Vremea, 2000), 14–57.

¹⁵³ Florin Constantiniu, foreword to *The RWP Plenum of 9–13 June 1958*, edited by Alina Tudor and Dan Cătănuș (Bucharest: Editura Vremea, 2000), 7–10.

Constantin Pârvulescu, one of the founders of the RCP, protested publicly against Ceaușescu's leadership in the front of the Twelfth Party Congress in 1979 but nobody supported him. Also, it is worth mentioning the confession Ileana Răceanu, herself an old-timer, made to her son Mircea in June 1981, two days before she died. Her statement is relevant because it goes beyond the usual criticism towards the personal rule of Ceaușescu and addresses the issue of disenchantment with the "actually existing" communism:

Myself and the others who, like me, in their youth believed in the communist ideals, never thought, even in our worst dreams, that we would get in such a situation! Yes, Mircea, we knew that it would not be easy, we knew that a perfect, ideal world does not exist, but it never, ever, occurred to us that the society we believed in would look like this one! I would like you to know that we did not dream of this, and we did not want to get here!¹⁵⁴

One should also mention that a strain of "rebellious communism" did not emerge in Romania as compared, for example, with Poland.¹⁵⁵ Marxist intellectuals and enlightened apparatchiks barely engaged in debates that would have led to a more sophisticated Marxist critique of the regime and thus permit the appearance of a faction of soft-liners within the Party. Monolithism proved to be a salient value even for the more sophisticated Party members. The absence of soft-liners within the RWP/RCP also explains why Romania did not

¹⁵⁴ Quoted in Mircea Răceanu, *Infern '89: Povestea unui condamnat la moarte* (Inferno 1989: The story of a prisoner sentenced to death) (Bucharest: Editura Silex, 2000), 158.

¹⁵⁵ In his conversation with Daniel Cohn-Bendit, held in Warsaw in May 1987, Adam Michnik confessed: "My political consciousness flows from these two traditions: that of rebellious communists, represented by [Jacek] Kuroń, and that of independent, secular intellectuals, like [Jan Józef] Lipski." See "Anti-authoritarian Revolt: A Conversation with Daniel Cohn-Bendit," in Adam Michnik, *Letters from Freedom: Post-Cold War Realities and Perspectives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 31.

experience a peaceful, “negotiated” revolution in December 1989 born of a deal between the opposition elites and a reformist faction within the Party.

During the 1980s, as a witness recalls, “nobody was taking communist ideology seriously.”¹⁵⁶ Although this might be true, it should be stressed nevertheless that people did participate to regular sessions of ideological education and thus continued to live the everyday lie. Witness accounts confirm that for ordinary Party members the issue of ideological training was perceived as just routine:

I was a Party member and, as a conscientious person, I was appointed manager of the political education sessions over a group of operators at the Accounting Center of the Ministry of Chemistry. *On the one hand, I did not dare evade the painful task. On the other hand, I organized ludicrous sessions, which would never last more than 15 minutes:* I’d babble on some speech that sort of made me sick uttering, possibly mimicked some discussion afterwards and that was it. For a whole year, no one reacted, no one complained [emphasis added].¹⁵⁷

Other ordinary Party members, more daring, went further and ridiculed the “political education” sessions when named by the propagandist in charge to take the floor and read an ideological paragraph. In this respect, the account of Speranța Rădulescu, an ethnomusicologist, is telling: “At the meeting, I sit next to two trustworthy ladies and told them: ‘Watch this, I’ll read every other line and you’ll see nobody will tell!’ And so I do. Nobody wonders, nobody protests, smiles, or ever notices anything.”¹⁵⁸ Nobody cared for what was read as long as it was about ideology. Nevertheless, the fact that people did participate to “political education” sessions is

¹⁵⁶ Account by Anca Manolescu, *Martor*, 124.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Account by Speranța Rădulescu, *Martor*, 125.

also telling, and this issue is addressed extensively in the section on the political cultures of resistance in communist Romania.

Since it was not about a “utopia in power” the erosion of ideology had little influence on bringing down the regime on 22 December 1989. In this respect, Mihai Botez, a Romanian critical intellectual, stated: “If utopia did not play an essential role in establishing and legitimating the communist regimes in Eastern Europe – as it did in Russia – what significance the *crisis* of that utopia could have?” Furthermore, Botez asked rhetorically: “Could the demythologization of an ideology that never operated as an authentic ideal damage the stability of the regimes in Eastern Europe?”¹⁵⁹ In the Romanian case it was not the erosion of ideology that brought down the Ceaușescu regime, but the erosion of its substitute, the Romanian version of national-communism developed after 1968 that some use to call “Ceaușescuism.” The case of the last communist leader of Romania is, however, different: he was thinking primarily in ideological terms. Ceaușescu, as a genuine true believer, allegedly sang “The International” in the front of the firing squad when he was executed by the revolutionary regime on 25 December 1989.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ Mihai Botez, “Declinul marxismului și criza comunismului” (Decline of Marxism and the crisis of communism), review of *The Crisis of Marxist Ideology in Eastern Europe: The Poverty of Utopia*, by Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Agora*, Vol.2, No.2 (July 1989), 84.

¹⁶⁰ Witness accounts provided by some of the main actors involved in the trial and the subsequent execution – General Victor Atanasie Stănculescu (former Minister of Defense) and Gelu Voican Voiculescu (former Deputy Prime Minister) – do not clarify this particular issue related to the death of the Ceaușescus. Folk memory however, has preserved the image of the Ceaușescu couple, hand in hand, singing “The International” in the front of the firing squad. For the above mentioned accounts and documents on the Ceaușescu trial, including the death certificates of the Ceaușescus, see Dorian Marcu, *Moartea Ceaușeștilor: Revelații și documente istorice* (The Death of the Ceaușescus: Revelations and historical documents) (Bucharest: Editura Excelsior, 1991), 11–123.

Communism was rather transplanted to Romania, than homegrown. At the same time, due to the particular way in which it evolved in relation to the political traditions of the “host” nation it gave birth to the local version of national-communism that ultimately led to the legitimation of the regime. As Wolfe puts it:

Because of the uniqueness of each country’s history, when nations borrow from each other – and in the age of world wars and world communications such borrowing has become well-nigh universal – what is borrowed suffers a change as it is transplanted.... But quite frequently, a borrowed institution may alter, even profoundly, the course of the life stream into which it enters. *Yet even more profoundly is it transformed by the life of which it becomes a part. Not institutions alone, but ideas and doctrines suffer a radical change on transplantation* [emphasis added].¹⁶¹

The Stalinist model transplanted to Romania went through a series of transformations after 1956, in the aftermath of Khrushchev’s condemnation of Stalin’s personality cult. Threatened by de-Stalinization, Gheorghiu-Dej and his men devised the strategy of political survival that was not centered from the very beginning on a skillful instrumentalization of nationalism. Once Khrushchev inaugurated his de-Stalinization campaign, Romanian communists had to look elsewhere for legitimacy and thus were compelled to initiate a process of “selective community-building,” that is, to strive to create new political meanings, shared by the communist ruling elite and the population, concerning the relationship between the Party and the society.¹⁶² The 1956 political developments at the Soviet bloc level imposed the devising of a new political strategy by the power elite in Bucharest. The selective nature of the community building process launched in the aftermath of the 1956 events needs

¹⁶¹ Wolfe, “Backwardness and Industrialization in Russian History and Thought,” in idem, *An Ideology in Power*, 49.

¹⁶² Jowitt, *Revolutionary Breakthroughs and National Development*, 74.

to be stressed once more. Not all the segments of Romanian society were allowed to take part in the process. Up to the year 1964, numerous Romanian citizens were imprisoned on political grounds while their offspring were denied basic civil rights. Obviously, they were considered “enemies of the people” and the community building process was not aimed at them.

However, the de-Stalinization launched by Khrushchev was a threat to Gheorghiu-Dej and his men, and a return to the people as the ultimate source of legitimacy was the only solution at hand. This is how a worldview developed within the ranks of the Party, i.e., the illegal RCP, during the interwar years and subsequently in Greater Romania’s prisons, was extended to the Party-State level. Marginalization, humiliation, external control, reliance only on the inner circle of power, made of *monolithism* and *emancipation* fundamental values shared by Gheorghiu-Dej and his men. Valued at the Party level, monolithism and emancipation were nevertheless synonymous with *unity* and *independence*, arguably the most powerful historical myths (alongside ancient roots and continuity) that were instrumental in establishing the modern Romanian nation-state in the mid-19th century. Nonetheless, his recourse to Party-State building in the guise of “selective community building” created the basis for Ceaușescu’s program of Party-State building in the form of an all-embracing nation-building project.¹⁶³

It took a rather long time until the Party learned the language of nationalism and fully understood the importance of national ideology. Thus, the power elite in Bucharest managed to reinvent Marx as a supporter of the national aspirations of the Romanians. A manuscript by Marx in which consistent references to the Romanians are made

¹⁶³ As Jowitt aptly puts it: “Given the highly concrete, rigid, hence superficial nature of Gheorghiu-Dej’s Marxist-Leninist beliefs, there was a chance that his regime could become nationalistic in the style of historic Romanian nationalism.” Jowitt, *Revolutionary Breakthroughs and National Development*, 224.

was discovered in Amsterdam in 1958; however, the manuscript was published only in 1964, when it became clear that it could serve the RWP policy of independence from Moscow.¹⁶⁴ Testimonies by former apparatchiks in charge with cultural issues support such an assertion. For instance, Pavel Țuguî, former head of the Scientific and Cultural Section of the CC of the RWP affirms in his memoirs that the publication of Marx's writings was part of the new "political strategy and tactics" pursued by the RWP after 1956.¹⁶⁵ Nevertheless, the Gheorghiu-Dej regime launched in 1958 a second wave of repression meant to tame further the population. The fact that the regime turned once again to repression – selective though this time, supports the argument that the Party was not sure of the effects the emerging nationalistic rhetoric would have on the population.¹⁶⁶ Until Gheorghiu-Dej's death in March 1965, there were two major domestic political events that deserve a closer look: the Plenum of the Central Committee held on 28 November – 5 December 1961 and the Declaration of April 1964. The CC Plenum of November–December 1961 provided a simple but effective description of Party's history since the end of World War II seen as a struggle between two camps: an autochthonous and patriotic one, and ah Soviet-oriented one. A first group, led by Gheorghiu-Dej himself, put Romania's

¹⁶⁴ Karl Marx, *Însemnări despre români – Manuscrise inedite* (Notes about Romanians – Unedited manuscripts) (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Republicii Populare Române, 1964).

¹⁶⁵ Pavel Țuguî, *Istoria și limba română în vremea lui Gheorghiu-Dej: Memoriile unui fost șef de Secție a CC al PMR* (History and Romanian language in Gheorghiu-Dej's times: The memoirs of a former head of Section of CC of the RWP) (Bucharest: Editura Ion Cristoiu, 1999), 185–86.

¹⁶⁶ On the wave of repression launched in 1958 see Romulus Rusan, *Cronologia și geografia represiunii comuniste din România: Recensămîntul populației concentraționale, 1945–1989* (Chronology and geography of communist repression in Romania: A census of detained population, 1945–1989) (Bucharest: Editura Fundației Academia Civică, 2007), 31–34.

interests above everything else. That group was fiercely opposed by a so-called Muscovite group, which served only the interests of the Soviet Union. Subsequent to Gheorghiu-Dej's speech, all the participants to that Plenum were called to reiterate the interpretation of their leader.

The document that epitomizes Gheorghiu-Dej's policy of independence from Moscow was issued in April 1964. Known as the "Declaration of April 1964," that document is one of the RWP's most important official documents. Simply put, the Declaration proclaimed that all communist parties were equal within the international communist movement, and therefore they were free to choose their own path toward communism: "It is the exclusive right of each communist party to elaborate independently its political line and specific objectives, as well as the ways and methods to reach them, by applying creatively the general truths of Marxism-Leninism and the conclusions it draws from the thorough study of the experience of other communist and workers parties." Moreover, the Romanian communists argued, it was by no means acceptable to talk about "parent' party and 'offspring' party, 'superior' and 'subordinated' parties" within the communist movement, which, the Declaration of April 1964 further stated, was a "large family of communist and workers parties having equal rights."¹⁶⁷ After claiming the right of each and every communist party to decide upon its own strategy of building "socialism," the RWP elite took the major step towards a decisive shift from "selective community building" to nation-building: the liberation of political prisoners. The general

¹⁶⁷ See *Declarație cu privire la poziția Partidului Muncitoresc Român în problemele mișcării comuniste și muncitorești internaționale, adoptată de Plenara lărgită a C.C. al P.M.R. din aprilie 1964* (Declaration concerning the position of the Romanian Workers' Party with regard to the problems of the international communist and workers' movement adopted by the enlarged Plenum of the CC of the RWP of April 1964) (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1964), 55.

amnesty led to the liberation of the overwhelming majority of political convicts by the end of August 1964.¹⁶⁸

However, Gheorghiu-Dej did not live long enough to see the results of this major policy shift. It was his successor, Ceaușescu, who turned Gheorghiu-Dej's incipient nationalism into a comprehensive nation-building process aimed at creating an ethnically homogenous "socialist nation" in Romania. Another unexpected event that occurred on the night of 20 to 21 August 1968 gave the RCP the opportunity to evaluate the force of the nationalistic argument. When Ceaușescu publicly condemned the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet led troops of the Warsaw Treaty Organization, the RCP gained widespread popular support almost overnight. Therefore, it might be argued that Ceaușescu's nationalism acted as ideological "cement" on the background of an obvious popular distrust for Marxism-Leninism. It was only in the conditions of the deep economic crisis of the 1980s and, even more importantly, in the conditions of the radical change of policy in Moscow after the coming to power of Mikhail Gorbachev that "Ceaușescuism," as an ideological substitute for Marxism-Leninism, entered in a terminal crisis. After 1985, when large segments of the Romanian society began to look to Moscow in the hope of persuading the Ceaușescu regime to improve their living standards, *independence from Moscow* – the cornerstone of the RCP legitimacy in the post-1968 period – ceased to appeal to a majority of the people. After the launch of Gorbachev's program of reforms, emancipation from the Soviet Union meant nothing for the Romanian population as long as Moscow became suddenly synonymous with restructuring and openness, while the independent Romania was heading towards disaster. In this sense ideological decay, understood as *the demise of Ceaușescu's national-communism* as an ersatz ideology, did play a role in the final demise of the communist rule in Romania.

¹⁶⁸ Rusan, *Chronology and geography of communist repression in Romania*, 35.

Chapter 4

CONJUNCTURAL FACTORS

Contingency played an important role in the final demise of the communist dictatorships in ECE. As mentioned from the outset, the present analysis concentrates on two kinds of conjunctural factors, i.e. external and internal. Given the nature of the power relations between Moscow and its European satellites, it may be argued that an external factor – which might be called the “Kremlin factor” – always influenced the decisions made by the power elites in Sovietized Europe. Until the mid-1980s, the “Kremlin factor” was synonymous with the involvement of Moscow in the domestic affairs of the “fraternal” countries in ECE, as it was the case in Hungary in 1956 or in Czechoslovakia in 1968. Once Mikhail Gorbachev came to power and engaged in a bold program of reforms, the “Kremlin factor” evolved into the “Gorbachev factor” and became synonymous with restructuring and openness. At the same time, unexpected events of historic significance or crucial decisions made by the Western powers contributed considerably to the demise of communist dictatorships in ECE. For instance, the election of a Polish Pope in 1978 was a major external factor that contributed in the long run to the collapse of communism in Poland. Furthermore, the Polish Roundtable Agreements concluded on 5 April 1989 initiated the “snowball effect,” which lasted until 22 December 1989 when the Romanian communism was brought down by a violent revolution. In the same vein, the determination of the American President Ronald

Reagan to establish a high-tech spatial weapon system forced the Soviet Union to invest more in weaponry, which weakened it economically and thus contributed indirectly to the breakdown of the communist regimes in Sovietized Europe.

It should be stressed though that the communist dictatorships in ECE proved to be particularly vulnerable to external conjunctural factors. Obviously, the influence of such factors on the six countries that experienced a regime change in 1989 should be assessed on a case-by-case basis. For instance, the Polish “negotiated revolution” initiated the “snowball effect” that had a considerable influence on the final demise of the communist regimes in Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Romania. Consequently, the Polish case poses difficult problems of interpretation with regard to the set of external conjunctural factors that contributed to the demise of the Jaruzelski regime exactly because a most powerful one, i.e. “the snowball effect” was not present. As for the case of Romania, this work contends that two external conjunctural factors were of paramount importance in the collapse of communism in that country: (1) the “Gorbachev factor;” and (2) the “snowball effect.” The Romanian communist regime also proved to be vulnerable in terms of domestic conjuncture. Although the internal conjunctural factors contributed to a lesser extent to the final demise of the regime, they should not be neglected. A major internal conjunctural factor was the coming of age of the 1967–1969 generation that originated in the policy of forced natality launched by Ceaușescu after his coming to power in 1965.

External Conuncture

The coming to power of Mikhail S. Gorbachev, who became secretary general of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in March 1985, and the launch of his domestic *perestroika* were events that had an immense impact on the communist regimes in ECE. As many authors have pointed out, the Soviet policy of non-intervention during the “miraculous year 1989” contributed enormously to the collapse of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe.¹ In many respects, the Soviet renunciation to the “Brezhnev Doctrine” was a decision of crucial importance that paved the way towards the “negotiated” revolutions in ECE, with the notable exception of Romania. As Archie Brown aptly put it:

The key to change in Eastern Europe was Gorbachev’s decision in principle to abandon Soviet foreign military interventions and his refusal to contemplate resort to them, even when the Soviet Union was faced with an utterly changed relationship with the area it had controlled since the end of the Second World War.²

One should be reminded that after August 1968 the relations between the Soviet Union and the Sovietized countries in ECE stayed under the sign of the “Brezhnev Doctrine.” Named after the Soviet leader Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev (1906–1982), the “Brezhnev Doctrine” stated that the USSR had the right to intervene in any country in which the communist power was threatened. The Brezhnev Doctrine was enunciated in 1968, in the aftermath of the Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO) invasion of Czechoslovakia during the night of 20–21 August 1968 that crushed the Czechoslovak communist

¹ Timothy Garton Ash, *In Europe’s Name: Germany and the Divided Continent* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 4.

² Archie Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 249.

reform movement known as the Prague Spring.³ At the time, Ceaușescu condemned both the invasion of a “fraternal” country by the troops of five WTO member states and the idea of “limited sovereignty.” Subsequently, the power elite in Bucharest rejected explicitly the Brezhnev Doctrine. Today it is generally agreed that an article signed by S. Kovalev, published in *Pravda* on 26 September 1968, represented the first official enunciation of the Brezhnev Doctrine.⁴ The response of the Romanian communists was delayed until 16 October when, at a popular meeting held in the city of Iași, the main urban center of Moldavia, Ceaușescu delivered a speech in which he stated:

One can also hear questions such as: “In the conditions of socialism do the affirmation and strengthening of national sovereignty and independence not contradict Marxism-Leninism?” We consider that such a question deserves the answer: No! On the contrary, only in socialism the conditions for the complete affirmation of national independence and sovereignty are achieved.... This is why we do not see any contradiction between sovereignty and socialism and we do not consider that, in the conditions of socialism, the problem of independence and sovereignty should be posed otherwise.⁵

³ The literature on the Prague Spring is immense. Nevertheless, a comprehensive collection of major documents from the beginnings of the Prague Spring to the Soviet and Warsaw Pact apologies to Czechoslovakia (dated 5 December 1989), is pivotal for a full understanding of the phenomenon. See Jaromír Navrátil et al., eds., *The Prague Spring 1968: A National Security Archive Documents Reader* (Budapest: CEU Press, 1998). For a collection of documents issued immediately after the events see Robin Alison Remington, ed., *Winter in Prague: Documents on Czechoslovak Communism in Crisis* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1969).

⁴ For the complete text of Kovalev’s article see S. Kovalev, “Sovereignty and the International Obligations of Socialist States,” in Remington, ed., *Winter in Prague*, 412–16. See also “Unofficial Enunciation of the ‘Brezhnev Doctrine,’ September 26, 1968” (Excerpts) in Navrátil et al., eds., *The Prague Spring 1968*, 502–503.

⁵ Nicolae Ceaușescu, *Cuvîntare la adunarea populară din Iași – 16 octombrie 1968* (Speech delivered at the popular meeting held in Iași – 16 October 1968),

In mid-November, however, a major event would give the supreme leader of the CPSU the opportunity to launch officially the Brezhnev Doctrine: the Congress of the Polish United Workers' Party (PUWP), which opened on 11 November 1968. On 12 November, the Soviet leader delivered a rather concise speech in which he practically reiterated the ideas contained by the *Pravda* article of 26 September. Thus, Brezhnev argued that the sovereignty of a socialist state could not be understood as solely a domestic problem of the respective state. In the case that the domestic evolutions in that country were threatening the "cause of socialism," then such a situation was becoming a problem of common concern for all communist countries:

It is common knowledge that the Soviet Union has really done a good deal to strengthen the sovereignty and autonomy of the socialist countries. The CPSU has always advocated that each socialist country determine the concrete forms of its development along the path of socialism by taking into account the specific nature of their national conditions. But it is well known, comrades, that there are common natural laws of socialist construction, deviation from which could lead to deviation from socialism as such. And when external and internal forces hostile to socialism try to turn the development of a given socialist country in the direction of restoration of the capitalist system, when a threat arises to the cause of socialism in that country – a threat to the security of the socialist commonwealth as a whole – this is no longer merely a problem for the people of that country, but a common problem, the concern of all socialist countries.⁶

in idem, *România pe drumul desăvârşirii construcţiei socialiste: Rapoarte, cuvântări, articole, ianuarie 1968 – martie 1969* (Romania on the road of completing the construction of socialism: Reports, speeches, articles, January 1968 – March 1969) (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1969), 578–79.

⁶ See Leonid Brezhnev, "The Brezhnev Doctrine, November 12, 1968," in Gale Stokes, ed., *From Stalinism to Pluralism: A Documentary History of Eastern Europe since 1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 132–34.

Communist Romania was not represented at the highest level at the 1968 PUWP Congress. Instead, Chivu Stoica, the secretary of the CC of the RCP, led the RCP delegation. On 14 November, Stoica delivered a speech in the front of the Congress in which he argued quite anemically for the thesis of non-interference in the internal affairs as a basis of relations between socialist states.⁷ That the Romanian communists deeply disliked the thesis of “limited sovereignty” one could also grasp from the fact that the Party newspaper *Scînteia* did not reproduce Brezhnev’s speech of 12 November 1968. Nevertheless, on 16 November, in his speech at the Writers’ General Meeting, Ceaușescu stated: “Life demonstrates that in our time the politics of interference in the affairs of other states – source of severe dangers as far as peace is concerned, spring of conflicts and perpetual tensions – is doomed to failure.”⁸ Ceaușescu made his refusal of the Brezhnev Doctrine plain on 29 November 1968 in the front of Romanian Grand National Assembly, which gathered in a special session to celebrate fifty years from the unification of Transylvania with Romania. In his speech, Ceaușescu resolutely criticized the concept of “limited sovereignty” applied to the relations between communist countries:

The thesis that one tries to validate lately, according to which the common defense of the socialist countries against an imperialistic attack presupposes the limitation or renunciation to the sovereignty of a state participating to the [Warsaw] Treaty, does not correspond to the principles characterizing the relations between socialist states and under no circumstances may be accepted. The affiliation to the Warsaw Treaty Organization not only that does not question the sovereignty of the

⁷ For Stoica’s speech, see *Scînteia* (15 November 1968), 5.

⁸ Nicolae Ceaușescu, *Cuvîntare la adunarea generală a scriitorilor – 16 noiembrie 1968* (Speech delivered at Writers’ General Meeting – 16 November 1968), in idem, *Romania on the road of completing the construction of socialism, January 1968 – March 1969*, 685.

member states, that does not “limit” in a way or another their state independence, but, on the contrary, as the Treaty stipulates, is a means of strengthening the national independence and sovereignty of each participating state.⁹

The Brezhnev Doctrine governed the relations between Moscow and the Soviet bloc countries over the period 1968–1985. Under Gorbachev however things changed fundamentally. For their part, the leaders of the Sovietized countries in ECE seemed not to understand that, or at least this was the impression of Aleksandr Yakovlev who confessed in a book-length interview with Lilly Marcou: “The former leaders of the East European countries did not take seriously, did not want to believe what Mikhail Sergeyevich kept telling them: ‘From now on, the political choice in these countries belongs to their peoples, everything is going to be done in accordance with their options.’”¹⁰

With regard to the relations between Moscow and Bucharest towards the end of Ceaușescu’s rule, Yakovlev states that they were “ridiculous and strained.” Furthermore, according to Yakovlev, Ceaușescu not only clung on his deeply entrenched ideological stance – he accused the Soviets of deviating from socialism and of “sinking the ship of socialism” – but, interestingly enough, blamed them for

⁹ Nicolae Ceaușescu, *Expunere la ședința jubiliară a Marii Adunări Naționale consacrată sărbătoririi semicentenarului unirii Transilvaniei cu România – 29 noiembrie 1968* (Speech delivered at the special session of the Grand National Assembly dedicated to the celebration of fifty years since the unification of Transylvania with Romania – 29 November 1968), in idem, *Romania on the road of completing the construction of socialism, January 1968 – March 1969*, 745–46.

¹⁰ Alexandre Yakovlev, *Ce que nous voulons faire de l’Union Soviétique: Entretien avec Lilly Marcou* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1991). Translated into Romanian as Alexandr Iakovlev, *Ce vrem să facem din Uniunea Sovietică: Convorbire cu Lilly Marcou* (What we intend to do of the Soviet Union: A conversation with Lilly Marcou) (Bucharest: Editura Humanitas, 1991), 114. The page numbers are to the Romanian edition.

“eschewing internationalist assistance.” In 1989, Ceaușescu was faced with the terrifying image of a new Soviet Union, which was not only unwilling to provide “internationalist assistance,” but was also warning him that what was happening in Romania “had nothing to do with socialism.”¹¹ An experienced diplomat – he was a Minister of Foreign Affairs under both Gheorghiu-Dej and Ceaușescu (1961–1972), Corneliu Mănescu has provided insightful comments on Gorbachev’s visit to Romania in 1987. As Mănescu perceptively observed, Gorbachev criticized in his speech the Brezhnev regime for stagnation, corruption and nepotism, a criticism that was perfectly fit for the Ceaușescu regime.¹² In the autumn of 1989, the Sinatra Doctrine replaced the Brezhnev Doctrine. This was made clear by the Soviet Foreign Ministry spokesman, Gennady Gerasimov, on 25 October 1989. Gerasimov stated that every country must decide for itself the path to be pursued and referred to Frank Sinatra’s song “I did it my way.” The Sinatra Doctrine cleared the way for the 1989 events in ECE. In other words, the “Gorbachev factor” made possible the appearance of the “snowball effect.”

The collapse of the Romanian communist regime cannot be discussed apart from the 1989 events in the neighboring countries. The “snowball effect”, namely, the unfolding of events in ECE during the year 1989 had a decisive role in creating a special state of mind among the communist ruling elite and the population at large. As we now know, the events in Poland, i.e. the Polish Roundtable Talks that took place during the period February–April 1989 initiated the sequence of collapse of communist regimes in ECE. As already noted, at the time – as András Bozóki observed – the Polish case was seen as “the only pattern of peaceful transition” and the Hungarian democratic opposition followed it closely.¹³ In the Romanian case, it was not by

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Betea, *Mănescu: Unfinished conversations*, 242.

¹³ András Bozóki, “Hungary’s Road to Systemic Change: The Opposition Roundtable,” in Király, ed., *Lawful Revolution in Hungary*, 65.

chance that the Ceaușescu regime collapsed only after the breakdown of all the other communist regimes in ECE, except for Albania and Yugoslavia, which did not experience revolutions in 1989.

In early December 1989, the Ceaușescu regime was still standing out as an island of immobility in a sea of changes. In this respect, Ceaușescu's last meeting with Gorbachev, which took place in early December 1989 in Moscow is telling. The encounter between the two leaders took place with the occasion of the meeting of the Consultative Political Committee of the WTO held in Moscow on 4 December 1989. It is worth mentioning that the Romanian delegation left Bucharest in the morning and flew back the same day, late in the evening.¹⁴ The minutes of the Gorbachev-Ceaușescu meeting reveals that Ceaușescu was not able to realize that the communist regimes in ECE had already collapsed one by one and that the peoples in those countries did not want a return to "state socialism."¹⁵ Ceaușescu tried to convince Gorbachev to organize, on the initiative of the RCP and the CPSU, a conference of the communist parties in Eastern Europe. During the meeting, Ceaușescu stated that he was deeply concerned with what was happening in some European communist countries. Moreover, he argued that the actions that were taking place in those countries were seriously threatening not only socialism, but also the very existence of the communist parties in the respective countries. In fact, the Ceaușescu-Gorbachev dialogue is telling of Ceaușescu's disregard for, or perhaps nescience of, the real course of events in ECE, as well as of his unwillingness to adopt a more flexible stand:

¹⁴ For more details regarding the meeting of the Consultative Committee of the WTO see Constantin Olteanu, *România – O voce distinctă în Tratatul de la Varșovia: Memorii, 1980–1985* (Romania – A distinct voice within the Warsaw Treaty Organization: Memoirs, 1980–1985 (Bucharest: Editura Aldo, 1999), 212–19.

¹⁵ See *Stenograma întâlnirii lui Nicolae Ceaușescu cu Mihail Gorbaciov la 4 decembrie 1989, la Moscova* (Minutes of the meeting between Nicolae Ceaușescu and Mikhail Gorbachev held on 4 December 1989 in Moscow), in Olteanu, *Romania – A distinct voice within the Warsaw Treaty Organization*, 234–43.

- Ceaușescu:* We have been contacted by some Parties and exactly because there is a very difficult situation within the communist movement we have the responsibility to do something even though only a few Parties would come [to the proposed conference]. Do you know what Lenin said in 1903?
- Gorbachev:* I am afraid not!
- Ceaușescu:* “No matter how few we are, we have to raise the flag.” People need to see that one takes action towards increasing the influence of socialism and strengthening the revolutionary movement.¹⁶

If Ceaușescu was not able, or not willing, to grasp the true meaning of the events that had taken place in ECE that autumn of 1989, this could not escape to those who served the regime. Moreover, archival documents indicate that those who served the regime did their job properly. The personnel of the Romanian embassies in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin, Prague, and Sofia covered timely and comprehensively the rapidly unfolding events they were witnessing. The present day reader is really amazed by the accuracy of those reports, which also specify the names of the recipients of such information. In a majority of the cases they were: (1) Emil Bobu, Member of the Permanent Bureau of the Political Executive Committee of the RCP and Secretary of the CC of the RCP; (2) Ioan Totu, Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs (26 August 1986 – 4 November 1989); (3) Ion Stoian, Secretary of the CC of the RCP and Minister of Foreign Affairs (4 November – 22 December 1989); (4) Vasile Milea, Minister of National Defense (17 December 1985 – 22 December 1989); (5) Iulian Vlad, Minister Secretary of State at the Ministry of Internal Affairs, head of the State Security Department – the Securitate (5 October 1987 – 22

¹⁶ Ibid., 236.

December 1989); (6) Nicolae Giosan, President of the Grand National Assembly; and (7) Miu Dobrescu, President of the General Assembly of the Trade Unions in Romania.

As already noted, the “snowball effect” was initiated by the Polish Roundtable agreement of 5 April 1989. Following that agreement, distressing telegrams were sent home by the Romanian embassy in Warsaw. Thus, the Romanian embassy in Warsaw informed Bucharest in due time on the legalization of Solidarity on 17 April 1989 in conformity with the Roundtable Agreement of 5 April. The telegram also referred to Lech Wałęsa’s appeal to the members of Solidarity to prepare for the June general elections.¹⁷ On 17 May, the Romanian ambassador to Poland, Ion Teșu, sent to Bucharest a report on the visit of the Hungarian Prime Minister Miklós Németh to Poland. The report also referred to Németh’s press conference in which the Hungarian Prime Minister stated that the scope of his visit to Poland was to familiarize himself with the political transformations in Poland that the Hungarian authorities were observing with great care. The said report also mentioned that the Hungarian Prime Minister characterized the Roundtable Agreement as a “historical event that permitted a normalization of the social relations and facilitated the implementation of reforms.” At the same time, Teșu reported on Németh’s answer to a question on the status of Hungarian-Romanian relations, posed by an Indian journalist. The answer, which was carefully summarized, stated that the relations between the two countries worsened and that the deterioration in terms of human rights observance in Romania was

¹⁷ *Informarea Ambasadei României la Varșovia către Ministerul Afacerilor Externe, 19 aprilie 1989, ora 19:00* (Report of the Romanian Embassy in Warsaw to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 19 April 1989, 1900 hours), in Dumitru Preda and Mihai Retegan, eds., *1989 – Principiul dominoului: Prăbușirea regimurilor comuniste europene* (1989 – The domino principle: The breakdown of the European communist regimes) (Bucharest: Editura Fundației Culturale Române, 2000), 51–52.

affecting not only the Hungarian and German minorities, but also the Romanian majority.¹⁸

Equally distressing messages were received from the Romanian embassy in Budapest. The Romanian ambassador in Budapest, Traian Pop, sent regularly detailed reports on the events in Hungary. On 20 May 1989, he sent to Bucharest a commentary on an important document issued by the Central commission of revision of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (HSWP). The document, entitled "The viewpoint of the central commission of revision on the situation of the [Hungarian Socialist Workers'] Party," was published on 19 May by the Hungarian press. After summarizing the document, Pop concluded that HSWP was prepared to acknowledge that in the future it would not maintain a monopoly on power and would have to adapt its practices to a multiparty system. According to Pop, the first to blame for such a situation was the secretary general of the HSWP, Károly Grósz, who "displayed a lack of determination and firmness of purpose in defending and promoting the Marxist principles and ideology, in the theoretical and practical activity of the Hungarian Party."¹⁹

A report on the meeting of the "reform circles" within the HSWP, held in Szeged on 20–21 May 1989, was promptly sent to Bucharest on 22 May.²⁰ On 24 May ambassador Pop sent a

¹⁸ *Raportul Ambasadei României la Varşovia către Ministerul Afacerilor Externe, 17 mai 1989, ora 12:30* (Report of the Romanian Embassy in Warsaw to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 17 May 1989, 1230 hours), in Preda and Retegan, eds., *The breakdown of the European communist regimes*, 60–61.

¹⁹ *Informarea Ambasadei României la Budapesta către Ministerul Afacerilor Externe, 20 mai 1989, ora 18:00* (Report of the Romanian Embassy in Budapest to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 20 May 1989, 1800 hours), in Preda and Retegan, eds., *The breakdown of the European communist regimes*, 63–66.

²⁰ *Raportul Ambasadei României la Budapesta către Ministerul Afacerilor Externe, 22 mai 1989, ora 20:00* (Report of the Romanian Embassy in Budapest to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 22 May 1989, 2200 hours), in Preda and Retegan, eds., *The breakdown of the European communist regimes*, 66–68.

telegram on the preparations for the reburial of Imre Nagy,²¹ and on the following day, 25 May 1989, reported on the main points of the “platform of the reform circles” within the HSWP. More importantly, ambassador Pop’s telegram of 25 May comprised a personal assessment of the situation: for Pop, the HSWP was in a “deep crisis” and the “reform circles” aimed at “demolishing the Party from within.”²² An even more sobering report, which summarized the main ideas expressed by the secretary general of the HSWP, Károly Grósz, in a televised interview broadcast on 30 May, was sent to Bucharest on 1 June 1989. In his telegram, ambassador Pop emphasized Grósz’s statement that the HSWP “earnestly wishes a multiparty regime.” At the same time, the Romanian ambassador accused Grósz of lacking a clear and firm stance towards the crisis the HSWP was facing and for not taking a clear stand towards the “factionist activity” of Imre Pozsgay.²³

The snowball was already rolling downhill. From June to December 1989 the Romanian embassies in the Sovietized countries in ECE sent home regularly reports that were almost alike: timely, accurate and detailed. For instance, telegrams sent from Warsaw spoke of the first (4 June) and, respectively, the second round (18 June) of the general elections and the victory obtained by Solidarity’s

²¹ *Raportul Ambasadei României la Budapesta către Ministerul Afacerilor Externe, 24 mai 1989, ora 17:00* (Report of the Romanian Embassy in Budapest to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 24 May 1989, 1700 hours), in Preda and Retegan, eds., *The breakdown of the European communist regimes*, 75–76.

²² *Raportul Ambasadei României la Budapesta către Ministerul Afacerilor Externe, 25 mai 1989, ora 21:00* (Report of the Romanian Embassy in Budapest to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 25 May 1989, 2100 hours), in Preda and Retegan, eds., *The breakdown of the European communist regimes*, 76–80.

²³ *Raportul Ambasadei României la Budapesta către Ministerul Afacerilor Externe, 17 iunie 1989, ora 23:00* (Report of the Romanian Embassy in Budapest to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1 June 1989, 2000 hours), in Preda and Retegan, eds., *The breakdown of the European communist regimes*, 86–88.

candidates.²⁴ A report from Budapest informed about the reburial of Imre Nagy (1896–1958) and four other leaders of the 1956 revolution. This particular message deserves attention due to ambassador Pop's gloomy conclusion: "The day of 16 June 1989 can be considered as a peak moment in the process of dissolution of the socialist system [in Hungary]."²⁵ On 27 July, in a telegram sent by ambassador Teșu from Warsaw one could read a similarly depressing news: "As a result of the dissensions and fractionist currents within the [Polish United Workers'] Party, the number of Party members continues to decrease and it is possible that, due to opposition's pressures, to withdraw [the Party organizations] from the economic enterprises."²⁶ On 12 August, a telegram from Budapest informed for the first time about groups of citizens from the German Democratic Republic who were trying to emigrate to the Federal

²⁴ *Informarea Ambasadei României la Varșovia către Ministerul Afacerilor Externe, 7 iunie 1989, ora 15:00* (Report of the Romanian Embassy in Warsaw to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 7 June 1989, 1500 hours); and *Raportul Ambasadei României la Varșovia către Ministerul Afacerilor Externe, 24 iunie 1989, ora 8:00* (Report of the Romanian Embassy in Warsaw to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 24 June 1989, 0800 hours), in Preda and Retegan, eds., *The breakdown of the European communist regimes*, 98–99 and 114–18 respectively.

²⁵ *Raportul Ambasadei României la Budapesta către Ministerul Afacerilor Externe, 17 iunie 1989, ora 23:00* (Report of the Romanian Embassy in Budapest to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 17 June 1989, 2300 hours), in Preda and Retegan, eds., *The breakdown of the European communist regimes*, 108–112. The other four persons were Miklós Gimes (1917–1958), Géza Losonczy (1917–1957), Pál Maléter (1917–1958), and József Szilágyi (1917–1958). Apart from Losonczy, who died in prison, in 1957, while on hunger strike, all the others were executed in 1958; a sixth coffin was added, in the memory of the "unknown freedom fighter."

²⁶ *Raportul Ambasadei României la Varșovia către Ministerul Afacerilor Externe, 27 iulie 1989, ora 12:30* (Report of the Romanian Embassy in Warsaw to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 27 July 1989, 1230 hours), in Preda and Retegan, eds., *The breakdown of the European communist regimes*, 139–41.

Republic of Germany via the West German embassy in Budapest.²⁷ A new report on the situation of the East German citizens who wanted to cross the Hungarian-Austrian border on their way to West Germany was sent to Bucharest on 19 August.²⁸

That communist Romania was trying to oppose the democratization process initiated in Poland became clear by mid-August 1989. During the night of 19/20 August 1989 Ceaușescu sent an official letter to the leaderships of the “fraternal” communist parties. The said letter contained the official point of view of the RCP and its supreme leader on the situation in Poland. In the evening of 21 August, the Romanian ambassador to Warsaw, Ion Teșu, was convoked to the CC of the PUWP where he received the official Polish answer to the RCP letter. In his report sent to Bucharest on 22 August, ambassador Teșu mentions that during the meeting, the secretary for international affairs of the CC of the PUWP, W. Natorf, stated: “We are surprised about certain reproaches contained in the [RCP] declaration, all the more that this was also sent to other countries in the [Warsaw] Pact. We were expecting to receive support in the difficult situation we face and not criticism.”²⁹ Briefly put, the RCP was worried about the fate of “socialism” in Poland and the possible effects the situation in that country could have on the

²⁷ *Nota Ambasadei României la Budapesta către Ministerul Afacerilor Externe, 12 august 1989, ora 17:00* (Note of the Romanian Embassy in Budapest to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 12 August 1989, 1700 hours), in Preda and Retegan, eds., *The breakdown of the European communist regimes*, 146–47.

²⁸ *Informarea Ambasadei României la Budapesta către Ministerul Afacerilor Externe, 19 august 1989, ora 20:00* (Report of the Romanian Embassy in Budapest to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 19 August 1989, 2000 hours), in Preda and Retegan, eds., *The breakdown of the European communist regimes*, 155–56.

²⁹ *Raportul ambasadei române la Varșovia către Ministerul Afacerilor Externe, 22 august 1989, ora 01:45* (Report of the Romanian Embassy in Warsaw to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 22 August 1989, 0145 hours), in Preda and Retegan, eds., *The breakdown of the European communist regimes*, 164–65.

“community of socialist states.” Furthermore, the Romanian communists considered that the participation of Solidarity’s representatives to the government was promoting the interests of “the most reactionary imperialistic circles.” Such a situation, the RCP letter considered, “was not only a Polish domestic issue, but an issue of concern for all socialist countries.”³⁰

Twenty-one years before, the Romanian communists had condemned the WTO intervention in the former Czechoslovakia and Ceaușescu had delivered his famous “balcony speech” of 21 August 1968. Subsequently, Romania had fiercely opposed the Brezhnev Doctrine and, as shown above, on 29 November 1968 Ceaușescu himself had proclaimed in the front of the Romanian Grand National Assembly that: “The thesis ... according to which the common defense of the socialist countries against an imperialistic attack presupposes the limitation or renunciation to the sovereignty of a state participating to the [Warsaw] Treaty, does not correspond to the principles characterizing the relations between socialist states and under no circumstances may be accepted.” Nevertheless, in his letter of 19 August 1989, Ceaușescu actually proposed the putting into practice of the Brezhnev Doctrine, i.e. the same doctrine he defiantly opposed for some twenty-one years. There is no wonder therefore that the official answer from the part of the PUWP – dated 21 August 1989 and transmitted to Bucharest by the Romanian embassy in Warsaw on 22 August – referred exactly to the principle of “non-interference in the domestic affairs” in the relations between

³⁰ Quoted in *Răspuns la punctul de vedere al Comitetului Politic Executiv al P.C.R. și al Președintelui Nicolae Ceaușescu în legătură cu aprecierea actualei situații din Polonia, inclusiv cu formarea guvernului Republicii Populare Polone* (Reply to the viewpoint of the Political Executive Committee of the RCP and the President Nicolae Ceaușescu with regard to the actual situation in Poland, including the formation of the government of the Popular Republic of Poland), in Preda and Retegan, eds., *The breakdown of the European communist regimes*, 165–67.

communist states that Romania defended since the WTO intervention in Czechoslovakia.³¹

As for the Hungarian official response to the RCP letter of 19 August, this came on 24 August and began with the following paragraph:

The leadership of the HSWP took notice with stupefaction and without compliance with the message sent by the RCP and the president Nicolae Ceaușescu, which suggests an urgent common action “making use of all available means in order to hamper the liquidation of socialism in Poland.”³²

Similar to the Polish answer to the RCP letter, the official response of the HSWP also referred to Romania’s “systematic call for the observance of the principles of non-interference in the domestic affairs and sovereignty in the relations between socialist states.” Therefore, the HSWP reply continued, the position of the RCP was “in complete disagreement with the Romanian standpoint with regard to the mentioned principles on which Romania based its policy in 1968 in relation to the events in Czechoslovakia.”³³

From that moment on, the Romanian embassies continued to inform Bucharest about the historic events that unfolded rapidly throughout ECE. Thus, they provided accurate reports on events such as: the decision made by the Hungarian authorities to permit the GDR citizens to emigrate to the FRG;³⁴ the inauguration of the

³¹ *Polish reply to the viewpoint of the Political Executive Committee of the RCP and the President Nicolae Ceaușescu*, 166.

³² *Informarea Ambasadei României la Budapesta către Ministerul Afacerilor Externe*, 24 august 1989, ora 14:15 (Report of the Romanian Embassy in Budapest to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 24 August 1989, 1415 hours), in Preda and Retegan, eds., *The breakdown of the European communist regimes*, 170–71.

³³ *Ibid.*, 171.

³⁴ *Nota Ambasadei României la Budapesta către Ministerul Afacerilor Externe*, 11 septembrie 1989, ora 14:15 (Note of the Romanian Embassy in Budapest to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 11 September 1989, 1415 hours), in Preda and Retegan, eds., *The breakdown of the European communist regimes*, 192–93.

Mazowiecki government in Poland;³⁵ the mass demonstrations in the East German city of Leipzig;³⁶ the dissolution of the HSWP;³⁷ and the events in East Germany that culminated with the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989.³⁸ The changes in ECE continued to proceed at a rapid pace: on 10 November the Romanian embassy in Sofia reported on the dismissal of Todor Zhivkov from the position of Secretary General of the CC of the Bulgarian Communist Party.³⁹ Beginning with 20 November, worrisome messages were also sent by the Romanian embassy in Prague.⁴⁰

On 20 November 1989, the Fourteenth Congress of the RCP opened its session in Bucharest. In his report to the Congress, which lasted five hours and a half, Ceaușescu, totally removed from reality, spoke about the “active participation of the whole [Romanian] society for defending the revolutionary achievements.” Obedient and

³⁵ *Raportul Ambasadei României la Varșovia către Ministerul Afacerilor Externe, 17 septembrie 1989, ora 17:00* (Report of the Romanian Embassy in Warsaw to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 17 September 1989, 1700 hours), in Preda and Retegan, eds., *The breakdown of the European communist regimes*, 196–99.

³⁶ *Raportul Ambasadei României la Berlin către Ministerul Afacerilor Externe, 3 octombrie 1989, ora 15:00* (Report of the Romanian Embassy in Berlin to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 3 October 1989, 1500 hours), in Preda and Retegan, eds., *The breakdown of the European communist regimes*, 208–209.

³⁷ *Nota Ambasadei României la Budapesta către Ministerul Afacerilor Externe, 7 octombrie 1989, ora 23:30* (Note of the Romanian Embassy in Budapest to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 7 October 1989, 2330 hours), in Preda and Retegan, eds., *The breakdown of the European communist regimes*, 217–18.

³⁸ See Documents: 145; 146; 148; 149; and 150, in Preda and Retegan, eds., *The breakdown of the European communist regimes*, 282–89.

³⁹ *Nota Ambasadei României la Sofia către Ministerul Afacerilor Externe, 10 noiembrie 1989, ora 18:40* (Note of the Romanian Embassy in Sofia to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 10 November 1989, 1840 hours), in Preda and Retegan, eds., *The breakdown of the European communist regimes*, 291.

⁴⁰ See Documents: 164; 165; 172; 176; 181; 184; 186; and 188, in Preda and Retegan, eds., *The breakdown of the European communist regimes*, 306–46.

frightened, the RCP elite did nothing to reform the Party from within at this last congress of the RCP, which was held on 20–24 November 1989. Silviu Curticeanu, a top communist official close to Ceaușescu during his last period in power, affirmed that the “authentic antechamber of the end [of communism] was the last ‘great forum of Romanian communists.’”⁴¹ It may be argued that the outcome of the Fourteenth Congress of the RCP determined the nature of the 1989 revolution. Some ten days before the opening of the RCP Congress, the Bulgarian communists had ousted Zhivkov, the supreme leader of their Party. The Romanian communists did not have the courage to proceed in a similar manner, which also contributed to the violent nature of the Romanian 1989 revolution. Official information from abroad however continued to flow towards Bucharest until 23 December 1989. Afterwards, the Romanian embassies started to send home messages of solidarity with the newly established National Salvation Front (NSF) and to condemn the “criminal Nicolae Ceaușescu for his acts through which, for a quarter of a century, established in Romania a regime of dictatorship and terror.”⁴²

As shown above, the Party, the military and the Securitate were very well informed about the unfolding of events in the communist countries of ECE. Therefore, many of those around Ceaușescu were psychologically prepared for similar events to take place in Romania. Colonel Filip Teodorescu, a former top Securitate officer, confesses that in October 1989, while keeping under surveillance a Westerner allegedly spying on Romania, he overheard that the fall of Ceaușescu was planned for 25 December 1989. The same Teodorescu maintains

⁴¹ Curticeanu, *The testimony of a lived history*, 365.

⁴² Among the first to do so was the Romanian Embassy in Belgrade. See *Nota Ambasadei României la Belgrad către Ministerul Afacerilor Externe, 23 decembrie 1989, ora 17:30* (Note of the Romanian Embassy in Belgrade to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 23 December 1989, 1730 hours), in Preda and Retegan, eds., *The breakdown of the European communist regimes*, 487.

that information gathered during the Fourteenth Congress of the RCP especially via surveillance of foreign delegates to the Congress allowed him to conclude that “an action was planned outside the country” in order to put an end to the Ceausescu regime.⁴³ Even more telling is the way in which the commander in chief of the Timiș county Militia, colonel Ion Deheleanu, evaluated the situation in Timișoara on 17 December 1989, one day after the unrest sparked in the city. That day colonel Deheleanu saluted the group of high rank officers coming from Bucharest to assess the situation with the words: “Could the whole General Inspectorate of the Militia come... Everything is finished, the accounts are settled.”⁴⁴

Further research is nevertheless necessary in order to reconstruct the atmosphere of those days at the top and medium levels of the hierarchy of the army, Party, and the Securitate. At the actual stage of research it can only be stated that the Party and the major institutions of the State were accurately informed about the unfolding of events in the countries of Sovietized ECE. Nevertheless, it is difficult to assess the quality and nature of information Ceaușescu received in that period. Many authors blamed Elena Ceaușescu for censoring the “unpleasant” information received from abroad and providing his husband only with doctored evidence. A former Romanian top official, who wished to remain anonymous, stated in a discussion with this author that the information that reached Ceaușescu was usually filtered twice: by Emil Bobu and Elena Ceaușescu. It is therefore reasonable to argue that, apart from his ideological orthodoxy, Ceaușescu himself was also misinformed on

⁴³ Filip Teodorescu, *Un risc asumat: Timișoara, decembrie 1989* (A risk undertaken: Timișoara, December 1989) (Bucharest: Editura Viitorul Românesc, 1992), 38–40.

⁴⁴ Quoted in General Ion Pitulescu, ed., *Șase zile care au zguduit România: Ministerul de interne în decembrie 1989* (Six days that shook Romania: The Ministry of Internal Affairs in December 1989) (Bucharest: n.p., 1995), 82.

the real proportions of the “snowball effect.” At the same time, numerous secret police and army commanders, as well as many party activists were rather well informed and consequently remained passive during the crucial days of 21–22 December 1989. In this respect, Curticeanu’s assertion has to be taken seriously: “The truth is only one, that the ending as we know it was so rapid also because *none of us* [the CC members] *did anything to help him* [Ceaușescu], because each of us wished and waited for his political demise as a liberation from an existence that had become insupportable [original emphasis].”⁴⁵ This assertion is also supported by the fact that military and Securitate commanders, such as the generals Vasile Milea, the Ministry of National Defense, and Iulian Vlad, the commander of the Securitate, repeatedly ordered their troops not to shoot to kill the protesters.⁴⁶

Domestic Conjuncture

The Romanian communist regime proved to be also vulnerable in terms of domestic conjuncture. Although the internal conjunctural factors contributed to a lesser extent to the final demise of the regime, they should not be neglected. Some factors were indeed of minor importance. For instance, during the period 16–22 December 1989 the weather was exceptionally mild both in Timișoara and Bucharest. A revolutionary from Timișoara recalls: “Since the events started to unfold, the weather was on our side. The sky was clear and it was unusually warm for the month of

⁴⁵ Curticeanu, *The testimony of a lived history*, 484.

⁴⁶ Pitulescu, ed., *The Ministry of Internal Affairs in December 1989*, 181–82.

December.”⁴⁷ This is not to say that had the weather been bad, the 1989 revolution would have not taken place. Nevertheless, the springlike weather played a role in creating an almost surreal atmosphere that contributed to the appearance of the short-lived sense of solidarity by a majority of the population during those days of December 1989.

Having said this, let us turn to an important internal conjunctural factor: the coming of age of the 1967–1969 baby boom resulted from the policy of forced natality launched by Ceaușescu after his coming to power in 1965. The issue needs a closer examination, so that some background information would be useful. On 1 October 1966, the Romanian Council of State issued Decree 770, which practically banned abortion. The 1966 banning of abortion led to a sudden increase in population over the period 1967–1969. In 1967, for instance, the number of births was nearly double in comparison with the preceding year.⁴⁸ As Pavel Câmpeanu has shown, before the banning of abortion there were 250,000 births per year in Romania, while in 1967 the number of births rose to 500,000.⁴⁹

The concept of political socialization has a particular relevance when applied in relation to the 1967–1969 generation in Romania. According to David Easton, political socialization refers to “those developmental processes through which persons acquire political orientations and patterns of behavior.”⁵⁰ One should note that the 1967–1969 generation was in its majority urbanized – it was also named the “first generation born in blocks of flats.” Furthermore,

⁴⁷ See the account of Dan Ștefan Oprea in Milin, *Timișoara in revolution and after*, 102. See also Stelian Tănase, *Miracolul revoluției* (The miracle of the revolution) (Bucharest: Editura Humanitas, 1999), 268.

⁴⁸ Gail Kligman, *The Politics of Duplicity: Controlling Reproduction in Ceaușescu's Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 52–59.

⁴⁹ Câmpeanu, *Ceaușescu, the countdown years*, 275–77.

⁵⁰ David Easton, “The Theoretical Relevance of Political Socialization,” in Louis J. Cantori, ed., *Comparative Political Systems* (Boston: Holbrook Press, 1974), 198.

that generation was raised in a climate of relative stability and modest economic improvements during the late 1960s and early 1970s. (As shown above, in Romania the economic crisis was felt beginning in the late 1970s.) Consequently, this generation went through a different process of political socialization and had different expectations than the generation of their parents. Furthermore, the 1967–1969 generation took advantage of the technological improvements brought about by communism, such as radio and television, and was therefore much more exposed to the international media. This issue, which deserves further elaboration, is addressed in a separate section below.

As the figures concerning the victims of the revolution show, the young generation joined immediately the protest and was extremely active during the December 1989 events. Thus, by looking at the age groups to which the victims of revolution belong one can get an overall image regarding the involvement of the young generation in the Romanian revolution of 1989. According to the calculations of the Ministry of Internal Affairs concerning the period 17–21 December 1989, the total number of victims of the revolution in Timișoara amounts to 376. Of them, 73 persons were killed and 303 injured. In terms of age groups, the victims can be arranged into the following categories: (1) up to 15 years of age: 8; (2) between 15 and 25 years of age: 133; (3) between 25 and 35 years: 120; (4) between 35 and 45 years: 81; (5) over 45 years: 34. As one can easily see, the most active persons in the 1989 revolution were those aged between 15–25 years (133 victims) and 25–35 years (120 victims).⁵¹

Nevertheless, such a calculation tells little about the numbers of the participants to the revolution. In this respect, there are no reliable statistics. However, the overwhelming majority of the witness

⁵¹ Pitulescu, ed., *The Ministry of Internal Affairs in December 1989*, 100–101. For the names of the victims of the revolution in Timișoara (16–26 December 1989) see Mioc, *The revolution in Timișoara*, 226–41.

accounts, memoirs, and testimonies of those who participated to the revolution in cities such as Timișoara, Arad, Sibiu, Tîrgu Mureș, Bucharest, Brașov, and Cluj speak about the massive involvement of the young generation in the revolution. For instance, a witness recalls that on 16 December 1989, somewhere after 1800 hours, there were “numerous youngsters, pupils and students” in the Maria (Mary) Square in Timișoara staying in the front of the house of reverend Tökés.⁵² This piece of information is confirmed by a report by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which mentions the presence of numerous young people in the area on 16 December.⁵³ An interesting aspect of the revolution in Timișoara is that students did not join immediately the revolution, while the young workers did.⁵⁴ A witness recalls that on Sunday, 17 December, around 2300–2400 hours a group of around 100 young workers came out of the workers’ dormitories in Calea Buziașului shouting “Romanians, join us!” and “Down with Ceaușescu!”⁵⁵ As already noted, of the total number of 376 victims in Timișoara during the period 17–21 December, 185 were workers.⁵⁶ Another participant to the 1989 revolution in Timișoara remembers that many youngsters were shouting anti-Ceaușescu slogans, while others were imitating Ceaușescu’s manner of waving his hand.⁵⁷

The participants to the events in Bucharest during the period 21 – 22 December 1989 tell similar stories about the involvement of

⁵² Miodrag Milin, “Azi în Timișoara, mâine-n toată țara!” (Today in Timișoara, tomorrow in the whole country!), in *Timișoara: 16–22 Decembrie 1989* (Timișoara: Editura Facla, 1990), 53.

⁵³ Pitulescu, ed., *The Ministry of Internal Affairs in December 1989*, 71.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 80.

⁵⁵ See the account of Gliguță Avram (injured in the revolution), in Mioc, *The revolution in Timișoara*, 40.

⁵⁶ Pitulescu, ed., *The Ministry of Internal Affairs in December 1989*, 100.

⁵⁷ See the account of Dan Ștefan Opriș in Milin, *Timișoara in revolution and after*, 34–35.

the young generation in the revolution. A participant to the mass rally of 21 December, Hermina Știrbulescu, told this author that when the meeting was disrupted she ran away. However, she recalls that she felt ashamed of running away while many youngsters, who were shouting slogans against the Ceaușescu regime, were appealing to the crowds to remain in the University Square and continue to protest. Other accounts speak of the courage of the youngsters who tried to negotiate with the riot police on the day of 21 December.⁵⁸ Nearby the Dalles Hall, in downtown Bucharest, a memorial plaque reads: “Mihai Gârlan, 19 years, fallen on 21 December 1989, 1730 hours. With him, other 12 youngsters died.”⁵⁹

International media fueled domestic discontent through the transmission of anti-regime messages and dissemination of images of the more affluent Western societies, which created an acute sense of frustration among a majority of the population in Romania. It was through the mechanism presented below that the external conjuncture played an important role in the collapse of the Romanian communist regime.

International media and the collapse of Romanian communism

Considering the reaction by the overwhelming majority of the population in December 1989, one is compelled to address a rather simple question: What determined the pro-active stances by the population against the regime during the period 17–22 December 1989? The answer is by no means simple. This section proposes a historical analysis of the way in which international media contributed in keeping alive, or in developing, a spirit of opposition towards the regime in communist Romania. Due to an intricate historical process,

⁵⁸ Perva and Roman, *The mysteries of the Romanian revolution*, 42–43.

⁵⁹ Urdăreanu, *1989 – Witness and participant*, 117.

by the end of the 1980s a large majority of the population used to listen to the information broadcast in Romanian by international radio stations and trust in general the information transmitted.

In order to investigate the above-mentioned process, the present chapter concentrates on the international broadcasting in the languages of ECE and takes into consideration long- and short-term processes. Furthermore, this analysis is based on the concepts of communication and propaganda. Communication is understood as the transmission of factual, straight information that observes the ethics of the transmission of information. Propaganda refers to mass persuasion, i.e., to the role of communication during the Cold War psychological warfare and the battle that opposed pro-democracy propaganda to communist propaganda. Although the focus of this chapter is communist Romania, when appropriate, reference is made to the representative events in other communist countries in ECE.

This section is structured on two parts. The first part discusses the Western, mainly American, efforts of international persuasion and anticommunist propaganda during the Cold War period (1949–1989) and concentrates mainly on the activity of Radio Free Europe (RFE).⁶⁰ It also analyzes the way in which RFE covered the first major event that shook the communist bloc, i.e. the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and how the broadcasting policy of RFE changed after that event. The second part addresses a more specific issue: the role of the international media in picturing, on the one hand, an idealized image of the “capitalistic” West and “the American way of life” and, on the other hand, in keeping alive the spirit of opposition in communist ECE. The argument put forward in this part is that, by emphasizing the great diversity of consumer goods produced by capitalism, this

⁶⁰ For a full analysis of the way in which the United States conducted their Cold War psychological warfare, see Michael J. Sproule, *Propaganda and Democracy: The American Experience of Media and Mass Persuasion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

sort of propaganda constantly undermined the communist propagandistic efforts. This part also discusses the specific role international media played in bringing down the Ceaușescu regime through the continuous flow of information which, after the coming to power of Gorbachev in March 1985 and especially during the “miraculous year” 1989, created a special state of mind among the population. The analysis also focuses on international media’s strategy of making use of both communication and propaganda, that is, of combining the transmission of straight information with more sophisticated methods of influencing public opinion. This kind of information, broadcast mainly by RFE, had an appreciable impact on the populations living under communist regimes, and eventually contributed to the appearance of the chain reaction that led to the collapse of communism in ECE. Arguably, international media played an important role in revealing and, by means of sophisticated methods of mass communication, (over)emphasizing the structural flaws of the communist system. By doing this, it contributed to the shaping of the political cultures of resistance in communist countries, and speeded up the process that culminated with the final demise of communist regimes. The following analysis demonstrates that, due to the specificity of the Romanian communism, i.e., the regime and community political cultures, international media had a strong impact on the collapse of communism in Romania. At the same time, one should be aware of the fact that international media had a more limited impact on the collapse of other communist regimes in ECE. In Hungary, for instance, due to the legacy of the 1956 revolution that shaped both the regime and community political cultures, international media had a less significant influence on the final demise of the communist regime. At the same time, international media played, for better or worse, a major role in the 1956 Hungarian revolution.

The Cold War propaganda warfare

Since the present analysis is also concerned with propaganda warfare, a brief survey of the structure of Western broadcasting in foreign languages during the Cold War period would contribute to a better understanding of the argument put forward by this part. According to George R. Urban, who was the director of Radio Free Europe between 1983 and 1986, there were two main streams of broadcasting in the national languages of Sovietized Europe.⁶¹ A first category was represented by the programs of radio stations such as British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Voice of America (VOA), Deutsche Welle (DW), Radio Vatican, etc. The main goal of these radio stations, however, was to promote the political, economic, cultural etc. interests of their governments. In other words, although they had an interest in the fate of the populations under Soviet-type regimes, their main purpose was to pursue their own national interests. A second type comprised Radio Free Europe (RFE) and Radio Liberty (RL), sponsored by the United States government. Both radio stations started their activity in 1951–1952, in Munich, Germany. Radio Free Europe broadcast in the languages of the “other Europe” and, more importantly, its scope was to identify itself with the aspirations, national sentiments, and cultural traditions of the populations that fell under Soviet occupation in the aftermath of World War II. Equally important, its role was to keep alive the hope of liberation and self-determination in those countries. As Urban aptly put it, the role of RFE was to speak to “Poles *as* Poles, Czechs *as* Czechs.”⁶² Radio Liberty had a more complicated mission, since it was destined to speak to the whole population of the Soviet Union. One should keep in mind that Soviet Union was, in fact, a colonial

⁶¹ George R. Urban, *Radio Free Europe and the Pursuit of Democracy: My War Within the Cold War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), ix–x.

⁶² Urban, *Radio Free Europe*, 2.

empire, and the radio had to address not only Russians, but also Ukrainians and other non-Russian populations with different agendas towards self-determination and national fulfillment, so the effectiveness of RL was seriously diminished.

There were also the critical events that shook communism in ECE to which RFE had to react and exploit in order to undermine the communist power in the respective countries. Events of this kind were the Hungarian 1956 revolution, the 1968 Prague Spring or the 1981 birth of Polish Solidarity. For instance, one of the most controversial issues related to the broadcasting policy of RFE in the 1950s was its involvement in the 1956 Hungarian revolution. Some authors have argued that RFE, through its Hungarian-language broadcasts, irresponsibly misled the insurgents and made them believe that a Western intervention on the side of the revolution was imminent. Recent analyses have revealed that it was an unfortunate interplay of misleading passionate comments and analyses from the part of the staff of the Hungarian Section of RFE, and a great deal of wishful thinking from the part of the revolutionaries who wanted to believe that the American administration was going to intervene militarily in order to support them. A brief survey of the RFE coverage of the 1956 Hungarian revolution would help one understand better why the broadcasting policy of RFE changed in the aftermath of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. Equally important, such an analysis would provide more elements for investigating the way in which the Romanian desk of RFE responded to the December 1989 events in Romania.

The 1956 Hungarian revolution broke out on 23 October, sparked by a demonstration of students from different universities in Budapest. The events in Hungary were also stirred by the spectacular changes that had taken place in Poland – the June uprising of the workers at the Stalin Works in Poznań and the return to power of Gomułka, who was reelected as supreme leader of the party at the Eighth Plenary Meeting of PUWP, held on 19–21 October 1956 – which were extensively covered by RFE. As Urban perceptively put it:

Radio management would have done well to recognize without delay the implications of Gomułka's rehabilitation and popular acceptance in Poland, and the enthusiasm with which Hungary's mushrooming student circles, schoolchildren's parliaments, dissident intellectual associations, and other "assemblies" were adopting and then beginning to apply the Polish example to Hungarian conditions, the culmination of the trend being the demand for Imre Nagy's return to power.⁶³

Nikita Khrushchev's "secret speech" to the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU in February 1956 contributed in many respects to the appearance of the Polish October and the sparking of the Hungarian Revolution later that year. It was in Hungary where Stalinists were the first to lose influence after the death of Stalin in March 1953. In July 1953, the Hungarian Stalinist leadership was forced to resign and Imre Nagy – who would become the main figure of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 – became Prime Minister. However, the first outburst of social discontent following the historic condemnation by Khrushchev of the crimes committed by Stalin against Party members occurred in Poland. The June 1956 revolt of the Polish workers in Poznań had a significant influence on the sparking of the revolution in Hungary. Paul Lendvai, for instance, affirmed that in Hungary "demonstrations of sympathy with Poland on 23 October 1956 turned out to be a direct prelude to revolution."⁶⁴ A brief survey of the 1956 events in Poland would be therefore useful. Thus, on 28 June 1956, in the context of a sharp economic decline, in the town of Poznań the workers from the Stalin Works went on strike.⁶⁵ The protesters marched into town demanding a wage increase, more dwellings for workers, and a revision of the stiff working norms and high taxation. The crowd marched towards

⁶³ Ibid., 229.

⁶⁴ Paul Lendvai, *Hungary: The Art of Survival* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co., 1988), 47.

⁶⁵ Kennedy, *Professionals, Power and Solidarity in Poland*, 26.

the center of the city where the demonstration took a violent form. The communist authorities intervened swiftly and savagely: the army fired at the demonstrators and, according to independent Polish sources, the number of victims amounted to 74 people killed and 400 wounded.⁶⁶ The bloody repression of the uprising led to a crisis at the top of the PUWP. In the end, Gomułka, the wartime leader of the Polish communists who had been ousted in the late 1940s for his insistence on establishing a “Polish path to socialism” returned to power on 21 October 1956.

As already mentioned, the revolution in Hungary was initiated by the student manifestation of 23 October 1956. The demonstrators met at the statue of General Bem, a Polish general who led the Hungarian revolutionary forces in the 1849 battles against the Habsburgs. Numerous inhabitants of Budapest joined the demonstration, so that the crowd that gathered at the statue numbered tens of thousands.⁶⁷ The same night, the crowd removed the statue of Stalin so that only a pair of boots remained on the pedestal. Almost at the same time, the protesters stormed the building of the public radio, and shots were fired by both those who guarded the building and from the part of the insurgents. Some authors consider that the storming of the public radio marked the beginning of the armed revolt.⁶⁸ From that moment on, the events unfolded rapidly. Imre Nagy, who was named Prime Minister, made efforts to find a political solution to the crisis while the revolution spread throughout the country. On 27 October, a

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Following the Polish model – the coming back to power of Gomułka – many shouted slogans such as: “Imre Nagy into the government!” Nagy, who was outside Budapest, and returned to the city in the morning of 23 October, was asked in the evening to speak to a crowd of around 200,000 people who waited for him in the front of the building of Parliament. Nagy spoke indeed to the demonstrators, but his discourse tried to appease the crowd, and many left frustrated.

⁶⁸ György Litván, ed., *The Hungarian Revolution of 1956: Reform, Revolt and Repression 1953–1963* (London: Longman, 1996), 58.

new government composed of less compromised communists was announced and on 1 November Nagy informed Yurii V. Andropov, the Soviet ambassador, about Hungary's decision the step back from the Warsaw Treaty Organization. In the evening, Nagy announced on the radio that Hungary proclaimed its neutrality. During the period 1–4 November, the pace of changes indicated a clear trend towards the establishment of a democratic political order. On 4 November 1956, the Soviet troops attacked Budapest and put an end to the Nagy's government activity. János Kádár, who silently left the revolutionary camp and sought refuge to the Soviets, returned with the Soviet tanks and, on 7 November 1956, his new pro-Soviet government was officially instated.

During the 1950s, no similar events occurred in Romania. As shown below, crucial events on which RFE had an appreciable influence occurred much later, i.e. in December 1989. However, since not many authors have addressed the Romanian reaction to the 1956 Hungarian revolution, some details are necessary. The Romanian communist elite condemned the Hungarian revolution and succeeded in convincing the Soviets of their profound loyalty all the more that the 1956 events in Poland and Hungary favored the strategy of the Romanian Stalinist leader, Gheorghiu-Dej, to preserve his personal power and avoid de-Stalinization. The population, however, sympathized with the insurgents and numerous individuals expressed their solidarity with the Hungarian revolution in those days.⁶⁹ In the city of Timișoara, the manifestations of sympathy towards the Hungarian revolution were the most virulent. As one of

⁶⁹ See especially the reports by the Securitate informers regarding the popular reactions to the 1956 Hungarian revolution in Corneliu Mihai Lungu and Mihai Retegan, eds., *1956 – Explozia: Percepții române, iugoslave și sovietice asupra evenimentelor din Polonia și Ungaria* (1956 – The explosion: Romanian, Yugoslav and Soviet perceptions of the events of Poland and Hungary) (Bucharest: Editura Univers Enciclopedic, 1996).

the participants confessed, students listened avidly to foreign radio stations, including Radio Budapest, searching for news about the course of events in the neighboring country. In Timișoara, the unrest developed slowly among the students from 23 to 30 October, when a mass meeting was called. The regime reacted swiftly and ruthlessly to hamper the spreading of the protest and thus, between 30 and 31 October 1956, the army and the secret police occupied the student campus and around 3,000 students were arrested. From among those arrested 31 people were eventually put on trial and sentenced to terms varying from 2 to 8 years in prison.⁷⁰ Although the protest was savagely suppressed, the population of Timișoara kept alive the spirit of anticommunist resistance and it was in Timișoara that the 1989 Romanian revolution was sparked.

As far as the broadcasting policy of RFE is concerned, the 1956 events in Hungary provoked significant changes. During the days of the Hungarian Revolution, many of the insurgents believed that the West would support them. Furthermore, many took literally the American propaganda. True, some rather irresponsible comments and appeals coming from RFE led many Hungarians to believe that their sacrifice was not in vain. As far as the broadcasting policy of RFE is concerned, some argued that the staff of the Hungarian Service was too right wing, which could explain the nature of comments and appeals broadcast in those days. Others stated that something was wrong at the management level of RFE. Whatever the explanation, a profound misunderstanding did occur. A young Hungarian revolutionary spoke in bitter words of the tragedy of a majority of the revolutionaries who thought that their revolt would be supported by the West: "Words like 'freedom,' 'struggle for national honor,' 'roll-back,' and 'liberation' have meanings.... If America wants to

⁷⁰ With regard to the 1956 events in Timișoara a precious witness account is Aurel Baghiu, *Printre gratii* (Through the bars) (Cluj: Editura Zamolxis, 1995), esp. 7–24.

flood Eastern and Central Europe with these words, it must acknowledge ultimate responsibility for them. Otherwise you are inciting nations to commit suicide.”⁷¹

Nevertheless, one should bear in mind that RFE *did not* provoke the 1956 revolution. Indeed, as Urban’s thorough analysis shows, the Hungarian-language programs of RFE caused profound misinterpretations *during* the 23 October–4 November 1956 events.⁷² What is important for the present analysis, however, is that from 1956 onwards the policy of the Radio changed. Consequently, during the following crises of world communism – Prague 1968, Gdansk 1980, ECE 1989 – no 1956-like appeals to frontal challenge were ever made. At the same time, the strategy of RFE relied upon a sophisticated combination of communication and propaganda meant to nurture domestic opposition to the communist regimes in ECE. The way in which such a strategy worked in the case of Romania is addressed below.

Ceaușescu’s Romania: From disenchantment to revolution

As already mentioned, the case of Romania is unique because the international media and especially the Romanian desk of Radio Free Europe played a major role in the collapse of the communist regime. One should explain, however, why the international media was so influential, and why the overwhelming majority of Romania’s population listened to the programs of the foreign radio stations. The answer is by no means simple, since it requires a detailed analysis of the period of decline that started around 1977. Between 1981 and 1989, Romania experienced a period of deep economic crisis, cultural autarchy, ethno-national propaganda, and widespread malaise. In

⁷¹ Quoted in Urban, *Radio Free Europe*, 220.

⁷² See Urban, *Radio Free Europe*, 239–42.

this context, two major trends converged and made an overwhelming majority of the population pay a special attention to international media.

First, it was about the emergence of an idealized image of the West. This led to a growing interest among the population, especially among the younger generations, for Western cultural products. Because of the economic crisis and the policy of cultural autarky enforced by the regime, indigenous cultural products were prevalent, from books to music and movies. Therefore, there is no wonder that audiences deserted and looked elsewhere for something new and entertaining. However, the quest for Western cultural products led also to a habit of listening to the programs in Romanian language broadcast by foreign radio stations. Among these, RFE programs featured prominently and contributed in many ways to the development of anti-regime stances among younger audiences.

Second, it was the character of the public life in the 1980s that determined a total mistrust of a majority of the population towards the official press, radio, and television. People were simply exasperated by the official propaganda, which spoke unrelentingly of the allegedly unparalleled achievements of the communist regime under the “wise guidance” of Nicolae Ceaușescu, the “Genius of the Carpathians.” The real situation was very different, and people knew it. Therefore, when they wanted to find more about recent international and domestic events they turned to foreign radio stations of which, again, RFE was usually the first choice.

The idealized image of the West. An idealized, even mythical, image of the prosperous West emerged among the populations living under “really existing socialism.” Such an image, continuously nurtured by the international media, contributed significantly to the breakdown of communism. A famous scene from the movie *Megáll az idő* (Time stands still) by the Hungarian film director Péter Gothár, wonderfully epitomizes this aspect. In post-1956 communist Hungary, at a party, someone brings a bottle of Coca-Cola – one of the most desired

beverages among the young generation under communism and one of the strongest symbols of the West and the “American way of life.” After sipping from his glass of Coke, one of the participants effectively gets drunk and has to be carried home by his brother and some friends.⁷³ This scene is perhaps the best illustration of how powerful the myth of the capitalistic West was among the young generations living in the Sovietized countries in ECE. Nevertheless, one should be reminded that in the late 1980s Hungary was better off than many of the other communist countries in ECE. To be sure, an idealized image of the West existed also in Hungary in the late 1980s but Kádár’s “gulyás communism” elevated the living standard to a certain extent and reduced accordingly the level of frustration among the population. An album published by András Gerő and Iván Pető, which reconstructs the atmosphere in Hungary during the Kádár era by combining photographs and press reports, conveys a convincing overall image of that period.⁷⁴

The case of Romania is perhaps more emblematic in analyzing the way in which international media contributed in spreading a mythical image of the affluent, capitalistic West. As shown above, until the mid-1970s the regime had something to offer to Romania’s population at large. Industrialization, urbanization, spread of education, acceptable sanitation, rather fair chances of upward mobility, all these led to a “tacit deal” between the regime and society. Beginning in the early 1980s, however, the economic policy of the Ceaușescu regime plunged the country into a deep economic crisis, characterized by food rationing measures for bread, sugar, cooking oil and other basic foodstuffs. Simultaneously, in order to reduce the external debt of the country, the regime drastically reduced imports, which deepened further the food crisis. In the conditions of economic

⁷³ Péter Gothár, *Megáll az idő* (Time stands still), 99 min., 1981.

⁷⁴ See András Gerő and Iván Pető, *Unfinished Socialism: Pictures from the Kádár Era* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1999).

failure described above, the West, with its affluence and freedom, became a sort of Paradise on Earth in the minds of the ordinary Romanians. Such a representation of the West nurtured to some extent the political cultures of the resistance in communist Romania. As a Western scholar aptly put it:

It is perhaps a sad but significant fact that the biggest factor in the fall of East European communism was not the desperate striving for political freedom so much as a desire for a Western standard of living seen on Western television which East Europeans could pick up, a standard of living that communist governments could not deliver.⁷⁵

This silent, long-term process of imagining the affluent West undermined significantly the efforts of the regime aimed at a total control of the society. It is also true that such a widespread, distorted image of the capitalistic West aggravated the syndrome of “civilizational incompetence.” People were not used to work hard, face competition and take risks, which led to difficult problems of adaptation to a functioning market economy in post-communist Romania. Turning to the situation in the 1980s, it should be mentioned that Western consumer goods became for many Romanians a sort of cult objects. Those who received parcels from the West used to invite their relatives or friends to the “ceremony” of parcel opening to admire together the colorful labels and nice packages, and have a taste of good life. Brand names such as *Fa* and *Lux* (toilet soap), *Kent* (cigarettes) or *Rifle* (Italian-made blue jeans) were synonymous with the affluent West. Western products were so desired that average Romanians developed strange habits. When they could procure from the black market a scented soap, say, a *Fa* soap – the German brand was particularly desired in communist Romania, they did not use it: they placed it inside the wardrobe to scent the clothes and the underwear. Furthermore, chronic shortages of consumer goods led

⁷⁵ Ian Adams, *Political Ideology Today* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 284.

to a politicization of consumption and to an increased attraction to Western goods. As Katherine Verdery put it: "You could spend an entire month's salary on a pair of blue jeans, for instance, but it was worth it: wearing them signified that you could get something the system said you didn't need and shouldn't have."⁷⁶

The idealized image of the capitalistic West and the "American way of life" also spread through informal networks of videocassettes. In many cases, communist officials or secret police officers brought such tapes to Romania and fuelled the networks.⁷⁷ In the late 1980s, a video player was also seen as a symbol of material affluence that one should rather conceal. For instance, a joke that circulated in Bucharest at the time reads as follows:

A kid was playing in the front of the block together with other kids whose parents and grandparents were sitting nearby. He saw his mom coming from work and shouted out: 'Mom, which is the most secret thing, that papa listens to the Radio Free Europe, or that we've bought ourselves a video player?'⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Verdery, *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* 29. Actually, in the 1980s, a pair of blue jeans was sold on the black market for 1,400–1,500 lei. To have an idea of how much that sum meant, it would be useful to mention that in 1987, this author, as a young engineer in his first year of activity, had a monthly salary of 2,160 lei.

⁷⁷ It was said that, in the late 1980s, communist Romania had the largest number of videocassette recorders (VCRs) per capita of all the communist countries in ECE. Although such an assertion is difficult to prove, if one looks into the advertising pages of the daily newspaper *România liberă* of the late 1980s, one can find numerous announcements for VCRs offered for sale by individuals. One should also note that the overwhelming majority of the population could not afford to buy a VCR. At the time, on the black market the cheapest VCR was sold at an average price of 45,000 lei, which was equivalent to 20 medium monthly salaries. Considering the prohibitive prices of video players, not to speak of video recorders, collective viewing was predominant.

⁷⁸ Reproduced in *Martor*, 72.

Nevertheless, as a Romanian sociologist suggested, the informal videocassette networks did not constitute dissident networks. At the same time, they contributed decisively to the spread of a mythical image of the affluent West. Those videotapes spoke – as an advertisement for the *Kent* cigarettes reads – about a “magic moment.”⁷⁹ A “magic moment,” it must be added, that could be experienced only in the capitalistic West, and certainly not under “really existing socialism.”

For those who could not afford a video recorder or did not have a friend or relative to own one, radio was a cheap and convenient means of evading from the everyday miseries of late communism. The official radio and TV broadcast boring, if not totally uninteresting programs, dedicated mainly to the “most beloved Man of the Fatherland” and the “Genius of the Carpathians,” i.e. Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu. One should be reminded that Romania was a special case since, during the 1980s, the national TV station broadcast only two hours in the evening, and almost the whole program was dedicated to the Ceaușescu ruling couple. For instance, on 27 January 1987, one day after Nicolae Ceaușescu’s anniversary that was celebrated on 26 January, the national TV station broadcast from 8 P.M. to 10 P.M. as follows:

8:00 P.M. – News;

8:20 P.M. – “We praise the country’s leader!” (Poetry);

8:40 P.M. – “Brilliant theoretician and founder of communism”
(Documentary dedicated to the theoretical work of
comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu);

9:00 P.M. – “We salute the supreme commander!” (Performance
realized by the artistic brigades of the army);

⁷⁹ See Bogdan Vasi, “Fenomenul ‘video’ și mirajul american” (The “video” phenomenon and the American mirage), *ICS – Inițiativa Culturală Studentească* No.3–4 (Bucharest – Tîrgu Mureș) (April – May 1996): 14.

9:50 P.M.. – News;

10:00 P.M. – Closing of the program.⁸⁰

It is therefore understandable why Romanians attempted to forget the hardships of the everyday life by shifting to the programs of foreign radio or TV stations.⁸¹ Moreover, one should be reminded that, as compared with East Germany, Czechoslovakia or Hungary, Romania does not border Western countries. Until 1989, the neighbors of communist Romania were Hungary, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and the Soviet Union. Consequently, many Romanians built special TV antennas to receive programs from neighboring countries. To be sure, the areas located in western Romania, such as the Timiș and Arad counties, had the advantage of being able to receive the more liberal programs of the Hungarian and Yugoslav TV stations. This aspect should not be neglected when analyzing the relationship between the exposure to the international media and the anti-regime attitudes in that part of the country. In Bucharest, however, the only alternative to the official TV program was the Bulgarian television. At the time, such a situation was subject of numerous jokes. For instance:

The schoolmistress: Children, tell me please the actions you take in order to put into effect the Party directives regarding electricity saving! Popescu!

⁸⁰ Reproduced in Sorin Mitu et al., *Istorie* (History) (Bucharest: Editura Sigma, 1999), 131.

⁸¹ To be sure, the regime was worried by the interest of the population in the programs of foreign radio and TV stations. Although it was not officially confirmed, in the late 1980s circulated persistent rumors about the alleged request by Ceaușescu to the managers of the Romanian consumer electronics factories (radio and TV sets) to design and produce equipment that could only receive the programs of the national Radio and Television.

Popescu: My mother keeps the food on the balcony so that she does not have to use the refrigerator.

The schoolmistress: Good! Ionescu!

Ionescu: When I come back from school I do not go out to play. Instead, I start immediately doing my homework, so that in the evening we do not have to turn on the lights.

The schoolmistress: Good! Bulă!

Bulă: In the evening, we watch the Bulgarian television so that we consume their electricity!⁸²

As far as “light” musical novelties were concerned, the foreign radio stations, such as RFE, Voice of America, BBC, Deutsche Welle etc. were the most listened to. The younger generations, especially, listened avidly to the late night rock music programs of RFE – intelligently placed after the political programs, and the Voice of America. In the conditions of the structural crisis of the late 1980s, however, the way from rock to opposition towards the regime proved to be unexpectedly short. Younger generations were more inclined to protest against the regime than the generation of their parents. Such a trend did not pass unobserved by the RCP and its secret police. Documents from the Securitate files show that during the 1980s the communist secret police was compelled to acknowledge the “extraordinary audience” the RFE programs had among adolescents in Romania. The Party was aware that the young public that listened to the musical programs of RFE could be transformed into a more politicized public that would contest soon the RCP policies. Measures were taken to identify and punish the adolescents who were writing to RFE to ask for musical dedications. For instance, in a report dated 16 February 1985, the Securitate agents informed that three

⁸² Dana Maria Niculescu Grasso, *Bancurile politice în țările socialismului real* (Political jokes in the countries of real existing socialism) (Bucharest: Editura Fundației Culturale Române, 1999), 200.

adolescents from Bucharest who had sent messages to the RFE musical program were identified. Their names were: Liviu Barbu (Secondary School no. 108), pseudonym Lie; Liviu Constantinescu (Industrial High School no. 27), pseudonym Lopez; and Daniela Toniu (Secondary School no. 160), pseudonym Kim. As a Romanian researcher aptly put it, the Securitate had a major problem in this respect: It proved to be quite difficult to identify and punish the hundreds of youngsters who were writing to RFE under pseudonyms such as Lord John, Marshal Hendrix, Richard Right, Zoly the 13th, Heavy Metal 21, The Crab with Eyeglasses or The Yellow Vampire.⁸³

The triangle of Romanian dissidence (1977–1989). During the 1980s, for a large majority of the Romanians the main source of information with regard to international politics, East-West relations and Cold War related issues was RFE. Since there are no surveys on the size of RFE audience in Romania during the communist period, the researcher is compelled to rely on scarce and unsystematic information. It may be argued that an appreciable part of the population used to listen on a regular basis to the RFE programs long before the effects of the economic crisis of late communism were felt. Such a tendency was also due to the increase in the number of radio sets per capita because of the launching of the domestic production of such consumer goods. The year 1977 was also a turning point in terms of the population's interest in the RFE programs. Episodes of protest against the regime on which the regime kept a total silence, such as the Goma dissident movement or the massive strike by the Jiu Valley miners made many Romanians turn to the RFE programs for details and comments. An unexpected event, i.e. the terrible

⁸³ For more on this, see Mihai Pelin, *Operațiunile "Melița" și "Eterul": Istoria Europei Libere prin documente de Securitate* (The "Grinder" and "Aether" operations: History of Radio Free Europe through documents of the *Securitate*) (Bucharest: Editura Albatros, 1999), 278–80.

earthquake of 4 March 1977 also made the RFE programs very popular in Romania. In the aftermath of the earthquake, many of those living abroad wanted to find out what happened to their close relatives and friends and RFE, through its non-stop programs, tried to cope with such a demand. RFE also provided information on the international efforts to help Romania and, more importantly, spoke of things that the regime wanted to avoid, such as the improper way in which the rescue operations were organized and carried out. This author, for instance, a schoolchild at that time, became acquainted with the RFE programs during the nights that followed the earthquake of 4 March 1977.

During the 1980s, however, RFE voiced a sharp criticism of the Ceaușescu regime based on both foreign *and* domestic sources. Again, although there is little systematic information on this topic it is generally accepted that RFE was one of the most, perhaps the most, listened foreign radio station in Romania during the 1980s. The voices of Noel Bernard, Emil Georgescu, Vlad Georgescu, Monica Lovinescu, Virgil Ierunca or Neculai Constantin Munteanu, to name only a few, entered every evening the homes of a majority of the population. It is also important to mention that after the collapse of the regime many of the former speakers, analysts, and collaborators of RFE published their diaries, memoirs, or the analyses written at the time. Such works are also important because they provide consistent autobiographical information and reveal that, in the overwhelming majority of the cases, those who worked for, or collaborated with, the Romanian desk of RFE opposed communism in the name of democracy and not because of strong right-wing convictions.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ See, for instance, Monica Lovinescu, *La apa Vavilonului 2: 1960–1980* (To Vavilon's waters/2: 1960–1980) (Bucharest: Editura Humanitas, 2001); Anneli Ute Gabanyi, *The Ceaușescu Cult* (Bucharest: The Romanian Cultural Foundation Publishing House, 2000); Mircea Carp, "Vocea Americii" în România, 1969–1978

The way in which the Romanian desk of RFE contributed to the final demise of communism in Romania deserves a thorough investigation. As already noted, widespread dissident networks, not to speak of a Solidarity-like movement, did not develop in Romania. However, isolate protests did occur and courageous people did speak openly against the regime. For such an isolated protest to become vocal enough as to embarrass the regime, two things were obligatory. First, that the protesters avoid imprisonment; and second, that his or her message spread among their fellow citizens. A most effective way to achieve these goals was to inform the Romanian Service of RFE about such initiatives. This way, international human rights organizations could be announced in due time and could provide support and some protection to dissidents by launching international media campaigns. At the same time, by making their voices heard through RFE, the few radical dissidents in Romania could reach a wider audience in order to disseminate their ideas.

Due to the particular conditions described above, in post-1977 Romania developed a particular relational nexus that might be termed as the *triangle of Romanian dissidence*. This can be defined as a relational nexus composed of: (1) the radical dissidents; (2) the Romanian desk of RFE; and (3) the silent mass of Romanians, unable or unwilling to articulate a coherent protest. This way, via the programs of RFE the Romanian dissidents influenced a major part of Romania's population and fuelled the growing discontent with the regime. Some examples would be useful in order to illustrate the way in which the triangular relational nexus of Romanian dissent actually functioned. For instance, writer Paul Goma initiated the

("Voice of America" in Romania, 1969–1978) (Iași: Editura Polirom, 1997); Nicolae Stroeșcu-Stînișoară, *În zodia exilului: Fragmente de jurnal* (Under the sign of exile: Pieces of a diary) (Bucharest: Editura "Jurnalul Literar," 1994); Noel Bernard, *Aici e Europa Liberă* (This is Radio Free Europe) (Bucharest: Editura Tinerama, 1991).

movement for human rights that bears his name by sending in January 1977 a letter of solidarity to Pavel Kohout, one of the leaders of the Czechoslovak *Charter 77*. Because of his open dissent, Goma was jailed on 1 April 1977. When the news concerning his imprisonment reached the Romanian Section of RFE, an international campaign was immediately launched and contributed significantly to his liberation. Similarly, another prominent Romanian dissident, Dan Petrescu, made his ideas known with the help of international media. His open criticism towards the regime – he stated clearly that it was the communist system to be blamed for the disastrous situation of the country and not solely the person of Nicolae Ceaușescu – spread among the Romanian population especially due to the programs of RFE.⁸⁵

It is also true that the information regarding the opponents of the regime was not always accurate. In Romania, few foreign press correspondents were dispatched and when they came their travels throughout the country were closely supervised. It goes without saying that such press correspondents were denied access to the opponents of the regime. There were different ways in which such protests reached the Romanian desk of RFE in Munich. In general, information arrived in the West through foreign diplomats, employees of the international companies, recent emigrants, and foreign lecturers associated with Romanian universities. In some cases, foreign reporters who decided to undertake great risks did manage to meet opponents of the regime. For instance, two reporters from Gamma News Agency realized, in April 1988, an interview with dissident Dan Petrescu. Shortly afterwards, the two were arrested, their equipment confiscated and they were expelled from Romania. Fortunately, a copy of the filmed interview was left behind in safe hands in the city of Iași, where the interview was taken, and smuggled to the West one year later. Finally, the interview was broadcast by

⁸⁵ See Petrescu and Cangeopol, *What remains to be said*, 231–43.

the French TV channel *France 3* on 26 January 1989, and re-transmitted by RFE on 8 February 1989.⁸⁶

The acerbic comments and analyses broadcast by RFE contributed decisively to the changing of the mindset of those who used to listen to such programs. Such people started to cast serious doubts towards the social, economic, and cultural policies enforced by the regime, and to develop a spirit of resistance. As the Securitate files show, the regime was particularly concerned about the persons that listened and disseminated information broadcast by RFE.⁸⁷ Announced by an unforgettable tune by the Romanian composer George Enescu – the main musical theme of his Second Romanian Rhapsody in D minor, Op. 11 – *Actualitatea românească* (Romanian actualities) was perhaps the most popular of the political programs broadcast by RFE because of its open criticism and pungent satire of the Ceaușescu regime. One should also mention the courage, determination and commitment for democratic values of the major part of those who worked for the Romanian desk of RFE. In numerous cases, the Romanian desk of RFE made possible the transmission of dissident messages that were not usually allowed by the broadcasting policy of the RFE, as established in the aftermath of the 1956 Hungarian revolution. Some of the commentators or collaborators of the Romanian desk of RFE went so far as to risk dismissal because of their support for the isolated voices of the Romanian opposition.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ For the complete text of the interview see Petrescu and Cangeopol, *What remains to be said*, 268–79.

⁸⁷ For more on this see Ionuț Dogaru, “Securitatea în anii ’80: Aspecte ilustrative de poliție politică” (The Securitate in the 1980s: Illustrative aspects of political police), in *Totalitarism și rezistență, teroare și represiune în România comunistă* (Totalitarianism and resistance, terror and repression in communist Romania) ed. by CNSAS (Bucharest: n.p., 2001), 161–62.

⁸⁸ See Document 399: *Notă informativă* (Informative note) dated August 1986, in *The White Book of the Securitate*, 352.

Such an activity incurred great risks from the part of the staff of the Romanian Service of RFE. It is also important to emphasize that under Gheorghiu-Dej the Securitate adopted a rather passive attitude towards the activity of RFE. This was due, on the one hand, to the rather small number of radio sets per capita and, on the other hand, to the limited number of contacts between Romanian citizens and citizens of Western nations, which limited drastically the amount of letters smuggled out of the country. Such an attitude was maintained during the first years of the Ceaușescu regime. Things changed fundamentally with the expansion of the domestic production of radio sets and, especially after 1967, with the gradual opening of the country for Western tourists. Consequently, from the late 1960s onwards the Party ordered the Securitate to take pro-active and even offensive steps to combat the activity of RFE.⁸⁹ One should also note that between 1981 and 1988 the Romanian desk of RFE lost three of its directors in a row – Noel Bernard (1981), Mihai Cismărescu – pen name Radu Gorun (1983), and Vlad Georgescu (1988). As Urban put it, RFE “had suffered no comparable loss in any of its other national services.”⁹⁰ These premature deaths were highly suspicious and many observers spoke of the active involvement of the Romanian secret police, although not much could be proved. According to General Ion Mihai Pacepa, perhaps the most prominent high rank officer that defected to the West during the communist years – he left Romania on 23 July 1978 and arrived in the US, via Frankfurt/Main, on 28 July 1978 – the Securitate was involved in those suspicious deaths. Pacepa speaks in his memoirs of a radioactive device, whose code name was “Radu,” utilized by the Securitate to irradiate regime’s opponents. According to Pacepa, Ceaușescu ordered

⁸⁹ See Pelin, foreword to idem, *History of Radio Free Europe through documents of the Securitate*, 8–9.

⁹⁰ Urban, *Radio Free Europe*, 127–28.

a portable version of “Radu” to be manufactured and placed in Noel Bernard’s office at RFE.⁹¹

Nevertheless, Ceaușescu’s determination to silence his most vehement critics in the Romanian Service of RFE was clear and dates back to 1977. A first attack against an editor of the Romanian desk of RFE was carried out on 18 November 1977, in Paris. On that occasion, two mercenaries allegedly hired by the Securitate on Ceaușescu’s orders savagely attacked and beat Monica Lovinescu, a reputed literary critic and RFE editor. (Beginning in 1967, Monica Lovinescu realized for RFE an important program, “Theses and anti-theses in Paris” which was widely listened to in Romania.) The attack on Monica Lovinescu was also linked to her active involvement in launching, in the spring of 1977, the international campaign in favor of writer Paul Goma. Fortunately, Monica Lovinescu has left a personal account of the attack. Unfortunately, her account cannot be corroborated with the information contained in the Securitate files. However, the information gathered until now indicates towards an involvement of the Securitate.⁹² A similar attack was orchestrated in July 1981, in Munich, against Emil Georgescu, one of the most caustic commentators of the Romanian Service of RFE. In the case of Emil Georgescu, however, the Securitate files suggest that the attack was actually a Mafia-type operation incurred by some murky financial arrangements in which Georgescu was involved. In the Georgescu case, is still unclear if it was indeed an operation of the Securitate or a revenge of Georgescu’s alleged dubious business partners.⁹³ Both

⁹¹ Ion Mihai Pacepa, *Red Horizons* (London: Heinemann, 1988), 416. Pacepa also states that Elena Ceaușescu was particularly angered by Emil Georgescu’s caustic comments and wanted to silence him.

⁹² For a personal account of the November 1977 attack, see Monica Lovinescu, *To Vavilon’s waters*/2, 247–52. See also Pelin, *History of Radio Free Europe through documents of the Securitate*, 119–22.

⁹³ On the attack on Emil Georgescu see Urban, 128. See also Pelin, *History of Radio Free Europe through documents of the Securitate*, 161–63 and 239–42.

Monica Lovinescu and Emil Georgescu were seriously injured, but survived the attacks.

In their search for dissident discourses in communist Romania, the RFE commentators also influenced, consciously or not, the nature of the post-1989 regime. After 1985, the name of Ion Iliescu was often associated with the name of Mikhail Gorbachev. Persistent rumors circulated in Bucharest about the intention of the Kremlin to replace Nicolae Ceaușescu by Ion Iliescu. In its determination to nurture opposition and dissent from within and outside the Party, RFE was equally interested in the person of Ion Iliescu. For instance, on 19 December 1987, in his program dedicated to reviewing a recently published book by Silviu Brucan entitled *Socialism at Crossroads*, Vlad Georgescu made reference to the views of Iliescu, which were in many respects similar to those of Gorbachev.⁹⁴ Such references contributed in making the name of Iliescu known to wider audiences, both in Romania and abroad, and contributed significantly to the widespread acceptance of Iliescu as the leader of the National Salvation Front in the afternoon of 22 December 1989. Iliescu himself has acknowledged the role played by RFE in emphasizing his critical stance towards the huge waterworks projects envisaged by Ceaușescu during the 1980s.⁹⁵

The role played by the international media in general, and by RFE in particular, during the “miraculous year” 1989 deserves further examination. A first thing to say is that towards the end of the communist rule in Romania, listening to RFE became customary. As writer Stelian Tănase noted in his diary on Thursday, 7 September 1989: “When I arrive home, along the doors on the hallway, the

⁹⁴ Vlad Georgescu, Editorial No. 42, “Reading Brucan,” Air date: 19 December 1987, Romanian Fond, OSA/RFE Archives, 3–4.

⁹⁵ Ion Iliescu, *Revoluție și reformă* (Revolution and reform) (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 1994), 41. For Iliescu’s own account of his critical stances towards the Ceaușescu regime see pp. 41–43.

buzzing sound of the short waves: people have switched definitively on Radio Free Europe.”⁹⁶ The particularity of the 1989 revolution in Romania resides also in the fact that the Romanian desk of RFE played a significant role in the collapse of the communist regime. As the present work demonstrates, a combination of structural, conjunctural and nation-specific factors made unavoidable a bloody revolution in Romania, unique in the context of the 1989 revolutions in ECE. The sparking of the revolution that eventually overthrew the Ceaușescu regime on 22 December 1989 was also determined by the news concerning the unfolding of events in the other communist countries in ECE. A participant to the 1989 revolution in Timișoara remembers: “For some years I was following daily the programs of Radio Free Europe and Voice of America waiting for ‘something to happen.’ It was clear for me that the end of Ceaușescu was close.”⁹⁷ Another revolutionary from Timișoara, Ioan Savu, confesses that he was walking by the Maria Square in Timișoara beginning with 14 December waiting for the *moment*, i.e., the revolutionary moment: “I felt that we, Romanians, were also close to the crucial moment of our existence. Fortunately, in Timișoara, we are kept informed with sufficient news from the free world by the Yugoslav and Hungarian TV stations. So far, the downfall of the socialist system had started in all the countries around us.”⁹⁸

International media had a considerable influence on the urban strata of the population during the period 16–22 December 1989, i.e. the period between the uprising in Timișoara and the revolt in Bucharest. The news about the Timișoara uprising reached the Western capitals from the night of 17–18 December onwards. Immediately, international media picked up the news and broadcast it widely. The Romanian desk of RFE, especially, re-transmitted the

⁹⁶ Tănase, *The official wintertime*, 143.

⁹⁷ See the testimony of Alexandru Corneliu Cuțara in Mioc, *The revolution in Timișoara*, 65.

⁹⁸ Quoted in *Timișoara: 16–22 Decembrie 1989*, 85.

news, both to the international and Romanian audiences. From that moment on, the overwhelming majority of the Romanian population knew that the inhabitants of Timișoara initiated mass protests against the regime. In this respect, eyewitness accounts abound. Daniel Vighi recalls that when the revolution sparked in Timișoara many of those who took part in the events were concerned with spreading the news to the outside world and their first thought was to announce RFE.⁹⁹ According to another participant to the Timișoara revolt, Dan Ștefan Opreș, in those crucial days of 16–22 December 1989 RFE was the only link between the Timișoara protesters and the rest of the country.¹⁰⁰ A majority of the Romanian population, including the present author, who witnessed the 1989 revolution in the city of Tîrgoviște, hundreds of kilometers away from Timișoara, heard about the revolt in Timișoara from the programs of RFE. Similarly, Liviu Antonesei, a critical intellectual from Iași, recalls the atmosphere of great tension he experienced in December 1989: “I shall never forget the almost non-stop programs of Radio Free Europe.”¹⁰¹ Again, in those crucial days, it was the continuous flux of information broadcast by RFE that mobilized the population and kept alive the hope in the final demise of Romanian communism.¹⁰²

When Ceaușescu ordered, somehow unexpectedly, for a mass meeting to be organized in Bucharest on 21 December, those forced to take part in the event knew perfectly well that by that time the city of Timișoara was effectively in the hands of the revolutionaries.

⁹⁹ Quoted in Miodrag Milin, *Timișoara în revoluție și după* (Timișoara in revolution and after) (Timișoara: Editura Marineasa, 1997), 29.

¹⁰⁰ Milin, *Timișoara in revolution and after*, 105.

¹⁰¹ Antonesei, *Diary from the years of the plague, 1987–1989*, 122.

¹⁰² For a collection of telegrams, articles, and news of the international news agencies, newspapers and radio stations during the period 17–20 December 1989, see Miodrag Milin, ed., *Timișoara în arhivele “Europei Libere” – 17–20 Decembrie 1989* (Timișoara in the archives of Radio Free Europe – 17–20 December 1989) (Bucharest: Fundația Academia Civică, 1999).

During the Bucharest meeting the crowds started to shout due to a provocation from within and, a few minutes later, a panic-stricken crowd was trying to leave the place. Intended to support Ceaușescu's rule, the meeting turned into an anti-Ceaușescu demonstration. Gathered in the University Square in Bucharest, some demonstrators erected a barricade and continued their protest during the night of 21–22 December. In spite of the bloody repression, the next day, 22 December 1989, large crowds blocked the streets of Bucharest and occupied the building of the Central Committee (CC) of the RCP, while other groups occupied the main building of the national television. When Ceaușescu's helicopter left the upper platform of the building of the CC of the RCP on 22 December 1989 at 1208 hours, the communist rule in Romania came abruptly to an end.

In the particular conditions of late communism in Romania – characterized by economic crisis and cultural autarky – the regime wanted people not to know what was happening in the rest of Sovietized Europe. Even more importantly, the regime wanted people not to realize that the Soviet Union itself had changed dramatically under the rule of Gorbachev. The international media, especially RFE, played an important role in revealing the structural flaws of the communist system and contributed to the shaping of the political cultures of resistance and in keeping alive the spirit of resistance in communist countries. Its role in the final demise of communism in ECE, particularly in Romania, must not be neglected.

This chapter has examined the influence of conjunctural factors, both external and internal on the collapse of Romanian communism. The main argument put forward is that Romanian communism proved to be particularly vulnerable to external factors, of which the most significant are: (1) the “Gorbachev factor;” and (2) the “snowball effect.” The renunciation by the Soviet Union to the Brezhnev Doctrine with the so-called Sinatra Doctrine meant that local agency, i.e. political action by power elites and opposition groups throughout Sovietized Europe, determined the nature and outcome of the 1989 revolutions in the respective countries. In the case of Romania

however, because of the independent stance towards Moscow adopted by the Romanian communists beginning in 1964 and explicitly from 1968 onwards, the “Gorbachev factor” led to the de-legitimizing of the Ceaușescu regime. After Gorbachev came to power in 1985, independence from Moscow as a crucial ingredient of Romanian national-communism lost its significance. On the contrary, the situation in Romania made people turn their eyes to Moscow in the hope that Ceaușescu would be replaced with a reform communist. At the same time, the snowball effect contributed significantly to the changing of the mindset of the population, which saw that from early January until early December 1989 the communist regimes collapsed, and democratic transitions were initiated, in five countries of what used to be the Soviet bloc.

At the same time, this chapter has addressed the issue of domestic factors that contributed to the final demise of Romanian communism. Among the domestic factors that contributed to the demise of communism in Romania, the coming to age of the 1967–1969 generation featured prominently. Born of the policy of forced natality implemented by Ceaușescu upon his coming to power, the 1967–1969 generation was particularly active in the 1989 revolution. This chapter has addressed at length the process of political socialization that the young generations in Ceaușescu’s Romania underwent from the late 1960s onwards through exposure to Western media, primarily to the programs of Radio Free Europe (RFE). Thus, although dissident networks did not develop in Romania as compared to other communist countries in ECE, the programs of RFE managed to create a sort of virtual network of individuals that received similar messages from the West via radio waves. Such a network lived a short moment of solidarity on 21–22 December 1989 and brought down the communist dictatorship in Romania. The lack of common socialization in an underground movement, however, did not allow for the transformation of the said network into a coherent political opposition, which also explains why Romania experienced one of the most complicated democratic transitions in ECE.

Chapter 5

NATION-SPECIFIC FACTORS

REGIME VS. COMMUNITY THE POLITICAL CULTURE APPROACH

The Romanian revolution of 1989 broke out and ensued violently, and therefore differed fundamentally from the rest of the 1989 revolutions in ECE. The 1989 revolutions in ECE broke out following a sequence of collapse that, as shown in Chapter 1, has the following configuration: Poland-Hungary-East Germany-Czechoslovakia-Bulgaria-Romania. Thus, one may argue that two elements are characteristic for the 1989 revolution in Romania, i.e. *nature* and *timing*. While the issue of *nature* refers to the fact that the Romanian revolution of 1989 was the only non-negotiated *and* violent, the issue of *timing* refers to the fact that Romania occupies the last position within the sequence of collapse presented above. In order to explain the peculiarities of the Romanian case, this chapter examines cultural values and attitudinal patterns, taking also in consideration the intricate relationship between structure and culture. As Gabriel Almond once noted, the relation between structure and culture is interactive: “One cannot explain cultural propensities without reference to historical experience and contemporary structural constraints and opportunities, and that, in turn, a prior set of attitudinal patterns will tend to persist in some form and degree and for a significant period of time, despite efforts to transform it.”¹

¹ Almond, “Communism and Political Culture Theory,” 157–58.

Romanian national-communism was born after 1956 from a strategy based on two core elements, i.e. *industrialization* and *independence*, which also illustrate the relevance of such a framework of analysis for the particular case of Romania.

Since the conceptual framework of this book has been presented in detail in Chapter 1, this chapter opens with a brief survey of the terms and definitions employed. Thus, this author draws on Jowitt's distinction between regime and community political cultures, which are defined as follows. *Regime political culture* is understood as: "A set of informal adaptative (behavioral and attitudinal) postures that emerge in response to the institutional definition of social, economic, and political life," while *community political culture* is defined as: "A set of informal adaptative (behavioral and attitudinal) postures that emerge in response to the historical relationships between regime and community."² It is this author's opinion that the regime and respectively community political culture are essential in explaining the nature and timing of the collapse of communism in Romania. In the terms of the present analysis, regime political culture is understood as the official political culture and is termed as the political culture of Romanian communism. As far as the community political culture is concerned, the most significant for this discussion are its subcultures that, in the terms of the present analysis, are defined as the political cultures of resistance against the regime. Consequently, this chapter concentrates on two subcultures that in the context of a particular set of structural constraints determined the nature and timing, as well as the

² Jowitt, *The Leninist Extinction*, 51–52 and 54–56. Some authors have nevertheless criticized Jowitt's taxonomy. For instance, Ronald H. Chilcote has argued that the three types of political culture defined by Jowitt "are described in jargonistic terms and are not effectively utilized in his analysis." See Ronald H. Chilcote, *Theories of Comparative Politics: The Search for a Paradigm Reconsidered* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), 197.

outcome of the 1989 revolution in Romania: (1) *the political culture of Romanian communism*; and (2) *the political cultures of resistance against the regime*.

This chapter addresses the attitudinal and behavioral patterns that characterize the relationship between regime and society, which emerged as a result of the successive transformations of the Stalinist model imposed on the Romanian society in the immediate aftermath of World War II. It should be stressed from the outset that these transformations took place under certain constraints imposed by the Soviet policy towards the “fraternal” countries in ECE in the general Cold War context, of which the Brezhnev Doctrine was perhaps the most significant for the purpose of this analysis. One can identify five main periods that characterize the relationship between the communist regime and the Romanian society in general over the period 1945–1989: (1) “revolution from above,” 1945–1956; (2) “community-building,” 1956–1964; (3) transition from “community-building” to nation-building, 1964–1968; (4) fully fledged nation-building, 1968–1985; and (5) disenchantment and de-legitimation, 1985–1989. Over these five periods two processes interacted permanently. On the one hand, the regime applied consistent policies meant to tame and subsequently co-opt the population. On the other hand, the population reacted to these policies in various ways ranging from collaboration to open conflict with the regime. The attitudinal and behavioral patterns that resulted from the complex interaction of these processes determined ultimately both the nature and timing of the Romanian revolution of 1989.

Regime political culture

When analyzing the particular features of the political culture of the Romanian communist regime over the entire period 1945–1989, a series of elements such as ideology, cohesion of the power elite, as well as the vision of politics and leadership style of Gheorghiu-Dej and respectively Nicolae Ceaușescu deserve a closer attention. These issues are discussed below for the five periods that have already presented above: (1) “revolution from above,” 1945–1956; (2) “community-building,” 1956–1964; (3) transition from “community-building” to nation-building, 1964–1968; (4) fully fledged nation-building, 1968–1985; and (5) disenchantment and de-legitimation, 1985–1989.

“Revolution from above,” 1945–1956

Following Robert C. Tucker, who has studied the “mental structure” of Lenin’s Bolshevism as a “party-state political culture” that came into being after the 1917 October Revolution,³ this section examines Gheorghiu-Dej’s “socialism” as a heavily context-dependent “party-state political culture” in the making. Let us examine the political culture of the communist regime in Romania over the period 1945–1956 with an emphasis on the three elements mentioned above, i.e. ideology, cohesion, and Gheorghiu-Dej vision of politics and leadership style.

The small group of Romanian communist militants numbered some 900–1,000 members in August 1944. This group took power with the backing of the Red Army and had no other chance of staying

³ Robert C. Tucker, *Political Culture and Leadership in Soviet Russia: From Lenin to Gorbachev* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1987), 34.

in power than to be completely subservient to Stalin and frantically emulate the Soviet model. As Kenneth Jowitt perceptively observed: "On coming to power, the Romanian [communist] elite possessed and was committed to a Leninist consensual ideology, but it did not have a set of politically and situationally relevant definitions derived from that ideology. In short, it lacked a '*practical ideology*' [emphasis added]." ⁴ Indeed, the official Party documents from the early Gheorghiu-Dej period show little, if any, theoretical sophistication. These documents reveal that the Romanian Workers Party (RWP) was rigidly and forcefully imposing the Soviet model upon the Romanian society, with no concern whatsoever for social realities.

As the "Resolution of the plenary meeting of the Central Committee of the RWP of 3–5 March 1949" explicitly states, in the aftermath of World War II the Romanian communists had two major objectives: the seizure of political power and the building of "socialism." ⁵ In practice, this meant the institutionalization of the Party and the industrialization of the country. The Party grew from the initial figure of some 1,000 members in 1944 to around 257,000 in October 1945 and to over 1,000,000 in February 1948. In 1948, it was claimed that "unsound" elements entered the Party, which had

⁴ Jowitt also argued that a "practical ideology" differs from a pragmatic approach to politics: "A 'practical ideology' is not synonymous with a pragmatic orientation. Rather, it refers to a set of action-oriented beliefs that are defined in terms which in significant respects reflect and are congruent with a given social reality and political situation." Jowitt, *Revolutionary Breakthroughs and National Development*, 76.

⁵ See *Rezoluția ședinței plenare a Comitetului central al P.M.R. din 3–5 martie 1949 asupra sarcinilor partidului în lupta pentru întărirea alianței clasei muncitoare cu țărănimea muncitoare și pentru transformarea socialistă a agriculturii* (Resolution of the plenary meeting of the Central Committee of the RWP of 3–5 March 1949 regarding the Party tasks in the struggle for strengthening the alliance of the working class with the working peasantry for the socialist transformation of agriculture) (Bucharest: Editura Partidului Muncitoresc Român, 1949), 7.

to undergo a “verification campaign.” As a result, 192,000 Party members were purged and until 1952 admissions of new members were suspended. Consequently, in December 1955 the RWP numbered approximately 539,000 members.⁶ Moreover, one could grasp from the Resolution quoted above that the focus on extensive industrialization was an axiom: the economic strategy of the RWP was based on the development of “socialist industry,” with a special emphasis on heavy industry and the “planned organization of national economy.” With regard to the “peasantry problem” the same document read: “Guided by the Marxist-Leninist teaching, our party sees in the peasantry problem a part of the general problem of the dictatorship of the proletariat, namely the problem of the main ally of the working class.”⁷ The “socialist organization of agriculture” meant in fact collectivization of agriculture, which was launched in the aftermath of the above-mentioned plenary meeting of the CC of the RWP of 3–5 March 1949.

As far as Gheorghiu-Dej was concerned, he did not elaborate on the building of a classless and stateless communist society or on the transformation of human nature under “socialism,” but simply praised the “triumphant ideas” of the official ideological forefathers.

⁶ For an analysis of RWP membership over the period 1945–1989 see Nicoleta Ionescu-Gură, “Introductory Study” to Florica Dobre et al., eds., *Membrii C.C. al P.C.R., 1945–1989* (The members of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, 1945–1989) (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2004), 20–22. With regard to the verification campaign of 1948–1950 and the number of purges see Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, “Raportul de activitate al Comitetului Central al Partidului Muncitoresc Român la Congresul al II-lea al Partidului – 23 decembrie 1955” (Activity report of the CC of the RWP to the Second Congress of the Party – 23 December 1955) in Idem, *Articole și cuvîntări, decembrie 1955 – iulie 1959* (Articles and speeches, December 1955 – July 1959) (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1960), 117.

⁷ *Resolution of the plenary meeting of the CC of the RWP of 3–5 March 1949*, 7–8.

A telling statement can be found in his discourse, delivered on 8 May 1951 and occasioned by the 30th anniversary of the Party:

The endless source of our Party's strength is its unabated fidelity for the triumphant ideas of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin. Our Party could face the most difficult challenges and went forward through the storms of the underground years due to its belief in the triumph of the proletarian cause instilled to it by the glorious Bolshevik Party and the brilliant teachings of the leader of world communism – comrade Stalin.⁸

At the Party apparatus level, the lack of a “practical ideology” determined a mechanical learning of Lenin’s interpretation of Marxism, centered on economic determinism and party control over each and every segment of society. As Vladimir Tismăneanu observed, the political credo of the Romanian communist elite “derived from the simplistic, Manichean worldview of the Comintern,” which did not allow for a Romanian Lukács or Gramsci to appear from within the ranks of the RWP/RCP.⁹ In the long term this feature would hamper the appearance of a faction of softliners within the Party and thus prevent a negotiated transition to democracy in Romania in December 1989. The issue of Party cohesion deserves further elaboration and is discussed below.

As far as the political culture of the Romanian communist elite is concerned, there were two major elements of continuity between the Gheorghiu-Dej and Ceaușescu regimes. These elements can be

⁸ Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, *30 de ani de luptă a Partidului sub steagul lui Lenin și Stalin: Raport prezentat în ziua 8 Mai la adunarea solemnă în cinstea celei de a 30-a aniversări a întemeierii Partidului Comunist Român* (30 years of struggle under the flag of Lenin and Stalin: Report presented to the solemn meeting dedicated to the celebration of 30 years from the creation of the RCP) (Bucharest: Editura Partidului Muncitoresc Român, 1951), 6.

⁹ See Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Stalinism for All Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 117–18; page numbers are to the Romanian edition (Iași: Editura Polirom, 2005).

identified as two major features of the political culture of Romanian communism, i.e. *Party monolithism* and *Party emancipation*. It is this author's opinion that these were most powerful myths of Party "regeneration" or "rebirth" in the aftermath of World War II, shared by the group of communists that were imprisoned together in the interwar and wartime periods. These two Party myths determined the particular way in which national-communism was born in Romania: not as a direct return to the interwar conceptualization of the nation, but as a process that spanned over some eight years (1956–1964) and was launched as a "selective community-building" process in the very special political context of the year 1956.

Preserving Party's unity was a central element of the political culture of both Gheorghiu-Dej and Ceaușescu regimes. Factions within the party had to be avoided at all costs. In this respect, one can grasp from Gheorghiu-Dej's official speeches what the supreme leader of the Romanian communists thought of the need to preserve the unity of the Party. For instance, in his speech delivered at the "solemn meeting" dedicated to the celebration of 30 years from the creation of the RCP, Gheorghiu-Dej stated that the most precious asset of the Party was its unity:

The unity of Party's ranks is its most precious asset. Without this unity, characteristic to a new type of Marxist-Leninist Party, we could not obtain successes in fulfilling the historical tasks that stayed ahead of us. The preoccupation for the unyielding unity of the Party, for the purity of its ranks, for the education of the Party members in the spirit of vigilance against the class enemy from inside and outside the Party and of intransigence towards deviations from the Party line, is a permanent duty for every Party organization.¹⁰

Similarly, a massive work published in 1960 by the Institute for Party History affiliated with the CC of the RWP (*Institutul de istorie*

¹⁰ Gheorghiu-Dej, *30 years of struggle under the flag of Lenin and Stalin*, 59.

a partidului de pe lângă C.C. al P.M.R.) defined one of basic principles of a Marxist-Leninist party as follows: “The Party represents *a unity of will that is incompatible with the existence of factions* [emphasis added].”¹¹ Under Gheorghiu-Dej’s rule, the observance of this basic principle led to assassinations, purges, and marginalization of Party veterans. One can grasp from the post-1989 testimonies of former nomenklatura members from the Gheorghiu-Dej period that the fear of factionalism was an essential and distinctive element of the political culture of the Romanian communist elite. Thus, Gheorghe Apostol, arguably Gheorghiu-Dej’s most faithful collaborator, has declared that he had made “a myth” of the idea of Party unity,¹² while Bârlădeanu has confessed that their generation feared factionalism “more than leprosy.”¹³ This is why there were only few notable attempts at creating a split at the top of the RWP hierarchy under Gheorghiu-Dej. Of them, the most significant was the aborted attempt by Miron Constantinescu, supported by Iosif Chișinevschi, to dethrone Gheorghiu-Dej in the aftermath of Khrushchev’s 1956 secret speech, which is discussed below. It was precisely this feature of Romanian communist regime that permitted to the group from prisons to control fully the party from 1952 onwards and, as already mentioned, it was the same feature that made impossible a negotiated solution involving an “enlightened” faction within the party and the opposition elites, and determined the sudden, bloody collapse of the regime in December 1989.

Party emancipation was an equally powerful RCP myth, born of the interwar years when the Party was compelled to follow

¹¹ Institutul de istorie a partidului de pe lângă C.C. al P.M.R. (The institute for Party’s history affiliated with the CC of the RWP), *Lecții în ajutorul celor care studiază istoria P.M.R.* (Lessons to help those who study the history of the RWP) (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1960), 620.

¹² Betea, *Maurer and the yesterday world*, 275.

¹³ Betea, *Bârlădeanu on Dej, Ceaușescu, and Iliescu*, 305.

unabatedly the orders coming from Kremlin. This also led to a profound political marginalization during the said period. This was due to the fact that the RCP propaganda had little success in reaching the hearts and minds of the overwhelming majority of the population of Greater Romania since the Party militated, as far as ethnic minorities were concerned, for “self-determination up to complete secession.” As mentioned in the section on ideological decay, in terms of leadership the RCP had during the period 1922–1944 only one general secretary of Romanian ethnic origin, Gheorghe Cristescu (1922–1924), while all the others were of non-Romanian ethnic origin: Elek Köblos (1924–1928); Vitali Holostenko (1928–1931); Aleksandr Danieluk Stefanski (1931–1934); Boris Stefanov (1934–1940) and Ștefan Foriș (1940–1944).¹⁴ Such a situation created a deep frustration among the ethnic Romanian members of the Party, whose salience could be grasped from witness accounts, testimonies and even Party documents long after the “group from prisons” took control over the Party.

When examining the identity-forming experiences of the postwar RWP elite, a truly significant aspect relates to the period of common socialization in prisons of those who would compose the future Party elite. Sociologist Pavel Câmpeanu provided an insightful analysis of the period spent in prison by the group of communist militants that included, among others, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, Gheorghe Apostol, Emil Bodnăraș, Iosif Chișinevschi, Miron Constantinescu, Chivu Stoica, Nicolae Ceaușescu and Câmpeanu himself.¹⁵ From Câmpeanu’s detailed account, one can grasp how important the period of common socialization in prisons was in determining the nature of the political culture of the Romanian communist elite and thus its cohesion. Marginalization, humiliation and harassment by

¹⁴. Constantiniu, *RCP, Pătrășcanu and Transylvania, 1945–46*, 34.

¹⁵ Pavel Câmpeanu, *Ceaușescu, anii numărătorii inverse* (Ceaușescu, the countdown years) (Iași: Editura Polirom, 2002).

the interwar authorities – Gheorghiu-Dej stayed eleven years in prison, between 1933 and 1944 – all these explain the determination of Gheorghiu-Dej and his “group from prisons” to eliminate their rivals from within the Party and, after the takeover, their former political opponents (especially the members of the historic political parties – National Peasant Party, National Liberal Party and Social-Democratic Party).

Furthermore, the members of the “group from prisons” went through a process of common socialization that enabled them to operate sharp distinctions between in-group and out-group individuals. Jowitt observes that Gheorghiu-Dej had a major interest in ensuring a high degree of Party cohesion. The same author refers to the concepts of “peer cohesion” and “hierarchical cohesion” and argues that Gheorghiu-Dej was primarily oriented to hierarchical cohesion, which refers to “bonds linking actors of different ranks.”¹⁶ Câmpeanu’s witness account tends to support such an assertion. As he puts it, the communists learned in prison a lesson of crucial importance: “*It was not the doctrine or the class relations that really counted, but the relationships based on personal subordination* [emphasis added].”¹⁷ However, Câmpeanu also stresses the dual character of the relationships established between communists during their prison term, due to the “equality of their condition:” “While Dej’s infallibility was taken for granted, even the younger [communist] prisoners were allowed to address him informally as ‘Ghiță’”¹⁸ Therefore, it may be argued that it was in fact a complex blend of peer and hierarchical cohesion that determined the unity of the “group from prisons,” which permitted it to avoid a major split at the top of the RWP/RCP until the

¹⁶ Jowitt, *Revolutionary Breakthroughs and National Development*, 143.

¹⁷ Câmpeanu, *Ceaușescu, the countdown years*, 101.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 58.

issuance of the “Letter of the six” former nomenklatura members in March 1989.¹⁹

Ironically enough, it was Mihail Hașeganu, one of Gheorghiu-Dej’s ambassadors to former Czechoslovakia and the United Nations that provided an insightful characterization of a communist supreme leader. True, the portrait was that of the Albanian supreme leader, Enver Hoxha, but it is this author’s opinion that such a characterization could be very well applied to Gheorghiu-Dej himself:

Personally, I perceived in him the specific traits of a Stalinist activist that was actually not the product of specific Russian abnormal outgrowths, neither of French left-wingers, nor of Chinese Maoism, but a synthesis of all these. *For this type of activist the central problem remains the power struggle, and he is able to walk over any creed or principle in order to fulfill his goals* [emphasis added].²⁰

Câmpeanu argues that Gheorghiu-Dej became a natural leader of the imprisoned communists for at least three reasons. First, it was due to his long period of internment, which, according to an unwritten rule, called for respect from the part of the other political convicts. Second, he was a living proof of the abuses of the interwar “bourgeois” regime that convicted a communist militant to a ten-year term in prison for organizing a strike. Third, Gheorghiu-Dej possessed a charismatic personality, doubled by a ruthless determination to achieve “unlimited power.”²¹ It should be added that after Stalin’s death Gheorghiu-Dej managed to impose upon

¹⁹ For more on the context in which the “Letter of the six” was issued and on its significance, see Cristina Petrescu, “The Letter of the Six: On the Political (Sub)Culture of the Romanian Communist Elite,” in *Studia Politica* (Bucharest), Vol. V, No. 2 (2005), 355–83.

²⁰ Mihail Hașeganu, *Din culisele diplomației: Memoriile unui ambasador* (Backstage diplomacy: Memoirs of an ambassador) (Bucharest: Casa de Editură și Presă “Viața Românească,” n.d.), 35.

²¹ Câmpeanu, *Ceaușescu, the countdown years*, 62.

the Party a particular political style that can be defined as follows: Under Gheorghiu-Dej's rule, RWP's immediate political goals were contextually defined and the strategies devised to pursue them were context-dependent.²² Such a political style enabled Gheorghiu-Dej to maintain his personal power in spite of the major challenges he faced during the year 1956.²³

"Selective community-building," 1956–1964

By the end of 1955, Gheorghiu-Dej was already the undisputed leader of the RWP. By that time, his major rivals from within the Party, i.e. Ștefan Foriș, Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu and Ana Pauker, had been either assassinated or purged. Nonetheless, one cannot predict the unpredictable. Consequently, Gheorghiu-Dej and his men could not predict the events that would affect deeply world communism during the year 1956, i.e. Nikita Khrushchev's condemnation of Stalin's personality cult in the front of the Twentieth Congress of CPSU and the Hungarian Revolution of 23 October – 4 November. This time, Gheorghiu-Dej's unlimited personal power was not threatened anymore by domestic factors, but by the very source of RWP's authority: the Kremlin. Such a new context called for a rapid adoption of a strategy of political survival, and the Romanian communists managed to devise one that had at its core a slow and cautious return to autochthonous values.

Khrushchev's attack on Stalin's crimes against Party members came as a shock for Gheorghiu-Dej. The RWP delegation to the

²² This approach was inspired by Ross' reflections on cultural analysis of politics. See Marc Howard Ross, "Culture and Identity in Comparative Political Analysis," in Mark Irving Lichbach and Alan S. Zuckerman, *Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture, and Structure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 44.

²³ For more on Gheorghiu-Dej's political biography see Florica Dobre et al., eds., *Members of the CC of the RCP*, 291–92.

Twentieth Congress of the CPSU was composed of four members: Gheorghiu-Dej (head of delegation), Miron Constantinescu, Iosif Chişinevschi and Petre Borilă.²⁴ Paul Sfetcu, who served as Gheorghiu-Dej secretary from 1952 until the death of the RWP supreme leader on 19 March 1965, accompanied the delegation and has provided valuable details on the atmosphere of great tension in the Romanian delegation during the Congress. True, Sfetcu's volume of memoirs is intended to rehabilitate Gheorghiu-Dej and praise his leadership, but at the same time it provides useful details regarding the reactions of the members of the Romanian delegation to Khrushchev's speech. According to Sfetcu, one could detect a latent hostility towards Gheorghiu-Dej in the way Constantinescu and Chişinevschi behaved in those days.²⁵ What is important for the present analysis is that upon his returning to Romania, Gheorghiu-Dej managed to buy some time in order to devise a political strategy of opposing de-Stalinization. Miron Constantinescu, supported by Iosif Chişinevschi, launched an attack on Gheorghiu-Dej's "personality cult" at a Politburo meeting in April 1956.²⁶ However, the two nomenklatura members did not manage to convince other prominent Party members to support them. Nonetheless, Gheorghiu-Dej's position was difficult at the time, and therefore it took him until the next year to oust both Constantinescu and Chişinevschi

²⁴ On the political biographies of Constantinescu, Chişinevschi and Borilă see Dobre et al., eds., *Members of the CC of the RCP*, 175–77, 149–50 and 108–109, respectively.

²⁵ See Paul Sfetcu, *13 ani în anticamera lui Dej* (Thirteen years in Dej's antechamber) (Bucharest: Editura Fundaţiei Culturale Române, 2000), 272–83.

²⁶ For details regarding the Constantinescu-Chişinevschi attack on Dej see Elis Neagoe-Pleşa and Liviu Pleşa, "Introductory Study" to Idem, eds., *Dosarul Ana Pauker: Plenara Comitetului Central al Partidului Muncitoresc Român din 30 noiembrie – 5 decembrie 1961*, Vol. 1 (The Ana Pauker file: The Plenum of the CC of the RWP of 30 November – 5 December 1961) (Bucharest: Editura Nemira & CNSAS, 2006), 41–49.

from the positions they held at the top of the Party. This happened on 28 June – 3 July 1957, at a Plenary Meeting of the CC of the RWP.

Contingency played a major role in saving Gheorghiu-Dej's political career: it was the sparking of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 that contributed decisively to Gheorghiu-Dej's political survival. The Romanian communist elite condemned the Hungarian revolution at once and succeeded in convincing the Soviets of their profound loyalty. In fact, the 1956 events in Poland and Hungary provided an unexpected support for Gheorghiu-Dej's efforts aimed at preserving his personal power and avoiding de-Stalinization. Thus, the communist elite in Bucharest took rapid measures to contain the spread of information about the real meaning of the events in Hungary. On 24 October 1956, at a meeting of the Politburo of the CC of RWP, was put forward a plan in 18 points meant to keep the situation under strict control. Top communist officials were sent to Transylvania in order to discuss the situation in Hungary with the population. For instance, Miron Constantinescu was sent to Cluj, while János Fazekás was sent to the Hungarian Autonomous Region. Other nomenklatura members were sent to calm down the German community, which was agitated by rumors that a reunification of families, i.e. mass emigration to West Germany, would be allowed by the Romanian communist authorities as a consequence to the unfolding of events in neighboring Hungary. An important aspect needs, however, to be stressed here. The Party was facing for the first time a major problem: it did not really know the state of mind of the population. Thus, at point 13 it was stated that the situation in Hungary should be explained through the trade unions to the workers, but this had to be done gradually, in order to assess the reaction of the audience and subsequently amend the official approach in order not to stir unrest. A special attention was to be paid to young audiences, especially the students. The document also specified that

it was crucial to ensure that the population was supplied consistently with basic foodstuffs such as bread, meat and edible oil.²⁷

Gradually, from 26 October onwards, the Romanian communists started to speak clearly about the events in Hungary as a “counter-revolution.” It was ordered that meetings be organized throughout Romania, in which workers and clerks, young and old, would condemn the “reactionary and fascist forces in Hungary and would express solidarity with the heroic struggle of the Hungarian working class for crushing the counter-revolution as soon as possible.”²⁸ Thus, the RWP sided without hesitation with the Soviets and provided immediate support. Consequently, at the Politburo meeting of 1 December 1956, Gheorghiu-Dej could proudly claim:

We are happy to say that we did not look passively as spectators at the events in Hungary. We were directly interested that the unfolding of events be in the interest of the Hungarian people and the future of socialism in Hungary, as well as in the interest of our camp; thus we did not stay passive and let the Soviet Union manage as it could, and therefore we had contributed a lot.²⁹

Nevertheless, one of the most telling documents related to the reaction of the Romanian communist elite to the Hungarian revolution is the report of two high rank officials, Aurel Mălnășan

²⁷ See “Protocol No. 54 al Ședinței Biroului Politic al CC al PMR din 24 octombrie 1956” (Minutes of the CC of RWP’s Politburo Meeting of 24 October 1956) in Mircea Stănescu, ed., *Organisme politice românești, 1948–1965* (Romanian political institutions, 1948–1965) (Bucharest: Editura Vremea, 2003), 396–402.

²⁸ This was expressed clearly on 26 October 1956. See “Protocol No. 55 al Ședinței Biroului Politic al CC al PMR din 26 octombrie 1956” (Minutes of the CC of RWP’s Politburo Meeting of 26 October 1956) in *Ibid.*, 403.

²⁹ See “Stenograma Ședinței Biroului Politic al CC al PMR din data de 1 decembrie 1956” (Minutes of the CC of RWP’s Politburo Meeting of 1 December 1956) in *Ibid.*, 472.

and Valter Roman, concerning the visit of the RWP delegation to Hungary in order to assess the course of events in Budapest. On 2 November 1956, in front of the RWP's Politburo, Valter Roman emphasized two major elements that, in his opinion, led to "counter-revolution:" (1) under the leadership of Mátyás Rákosi, the Hungarian Workers' Party did not manage to be accepted by the Hungarian people due to its arrogance and disregard for national traditions, as well as for its total subservience to Stalin and the Soviet Union; and (2) the leadership of the Hungarian Workers' Party displayed an "anti-Romanian spirit" and "never took a just stance with regard to Transylvania;" in this respect, Valter Roman quoted the words of János Kádár, whom he met in Budapest during his visit: "Give autonomy to Transylvania!"³⁰ Arguably, the two conclusions with regard to the causes of the revolutionary events in Hungary, presented in front of the RWP Politburo, were, in fact, major elements of the political culture of Romanian communism: *fear of Moscow* and *distrust towards Budapest*.

As shown above, *Party monolithism* and *Party emancipation* are concepts that enable one understand better the particularities of the political culture of Romanian communism. Furthermore, two major features related to Romanian communist elite's perception of its enemies from within the communist camp – *fear of Moscow* and *distrust toward Budapest* – were reinforced by the lessons of the year 1956. To be sure, these features were shaped by a long process of building the Romanian identity in opposition to two strong identities from neighboring empires – Russian and Hungarian – from the mid-19th century onwards. However, the strategy of political survival – based on a return to the traditional values associated to the Romanian identity and extensive industrialization – devised by Gheorghiu-Dej

³⁰ See "Stenograma Ședinței din data de 2 noiembrie 1956 cu tov. Aurel Mălnășan și Valter Roman" (Minutes of the Meeting of 2 November 1956 with comrades Aurel Mălnășan și Valter Roman) in *Ibid.*, 409–427.

in 1956, in the aftermath of the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU and the Hungarian Revolution, strongly reinforced these elements. Gheorghiu-Dej's political strategy was strictly followed by Ceaușescu who internalized the crucial elements mentioned above through a long process of political socialization within Gheorghiu-Dej's inner circle of power. Ceaușescu, though, was less imaginative and capable of adopting flexible policies according to the domestic and international contexts in comparison to Gheorghiu-Dej.

As an American scholar observed, "Romanian leaders have successfully capitalized upon the non-Slavic identity of the population."³¹ But this did not happen overnight: things changed in the direction desired by the Party during the period 1956–1964. It should be added to this that it was also a slight improvement of the standard of living that found an echo in the hearts and minds of a majority of Romania's population. If one looks attentively at the shares allotted to accumulation and consumption over the entire communist period, one observes that it was in the aftermath of the Hungarian Revolution that the RWP decided to raise significantly the share of consumption. As shown in the section on economic decline, during the period 1956–1960, 82.9% of the national income went to the consumption fund while only 17.1% went to the accumulation fund. This was the largest share ever allotted to the consumption fund under communist rule in Romania.³² Thus, due to a particular conjuncture, *fear of Moscow* and *distrust towards Budapest* were reinforced as major shared understandings of intra-bloc politics at the level of the Romanian communist elite. Ironically enough, these two features also characterized the political culture of the Romanian elite in the interwar period, as a direct result of the Soviet and Hungarian claims against Romania.

³¹ Ronald H. Linden, "Romanian Foreign Policy in the 1980s," in Daniel Nelson, ed., *Romania in the 1980s* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1981), 229.

³² Mureșan, *Economic evolutions, 1945–1990*, 87.

Paradoxically, it was also a Soviet political decision that served, quite unexpectedly, Romanian communists' efforts of opposing de-Stalinization: the decision to withdraw their troops from Romania. A former high-rank official of the RWP/RCP, Gheorghe Apostol, remembers that the issue was first raised in 1955, after the Soviet army withdrew from Austria. Although the Romanian communists' request enraged Khrushchev on the spot, later on he decided to order the withdrawal of the Soviet troops. No matter how the decision was made, the 1958 Soviet troops' withdrawal from Romania represented the coming of a new era in the history of RWP. Western sources, such as the US legation in Bucharest, perceived at the time the withdrawal from Romania as an initiative of the Soviet Union, and recent scholarship supports such an assertion.³³ That Gheorghiu-Dej was extremely pleased with the withdrawal of the Soviet troops, one could grasp – as historian Vlad Georgescu noted – from his servile speech of 25 July 1958, on the occasion of the departure of the last echelons of Soviet troops from Romania.³⁴ Thus, by the end of 1958 Gheorghiu-Dej had good reasons to congratulate himself for his political ability. He had managed not only to demote his main critics from within the Party, but also to survive the first wave of de-Stalinization. On top of this, the Soviet troops had left the country. Yet, there was something that he did not manage to achieve: the full support of his own people.

As already mentioned, the strategy of political survival devised by Gheorghiu-Dej and his men was not centered from the very beginning on a skillful instrumentalization of nationalism. There is

³³ See Sergiu Verona, *Military Occupation and Diplomacy: Soviet Troops in Romania, 1944–1958* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 122–40.

³⁴ For documents related to the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Romania, see Ioan Scurtu, ed., *România: Retragerea trupelor sovietice – 1958* (Romania: The withdrawal of the Soviet troops – 1958) (Bucharest: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, 1996). For Gheorghiu-Dej's discourse of 25 July 1958, see pp. 355–61.

little evidence that the Romanian communist elite mastered the main elements of traditional Romanian nationalism. Nonetheless, after 1956 the Romanian communists had to look elsewhere for legitimacy and thus were compelled to initiate a process of “selective community-building,” that is, to strive to create new political meanings, shared by the communist ruling elite and the population, concerning the relationship between the Party and the society.³⁵ Such a process was launched as an expansion of the within-group, i.e. within-the-group-from-prisons, vision of politics. In other words, it was not a dormant sense of national identity that was awakened in the political conjuncture of the year 1956. On the contrary, the context of 1956 imposed the devising of a new political strategy and that strategy was designed as a selective expansion to a majority – but by no means to all – segments of the Romanian society of the within-the-group-from-prisons worldview. The selective nature of the community-building process launched in the aftermath of the 1956 events needs to be stressed once more. Not all the segments of Romanian society were allowed to take part in the process. Up to the year 1964, numerous Romanian citizens were imprisoned on political grounds while their offspring were denied basic civil rights.³⁶ Obviously, they were considered “enemies of the people” and the community building process was not aimed at them.

However, the de-Stalinization launched by Khrushchev was a threat to Gheorghiu-Dej and his men, and a return to the people – “enemies of the people” excluded – as the ultimate source of legitimacy was the only

³⁵ Jowitt, *Revolutionary Breakthroughs and National Development*, 74.

³⁶ The most recent estimate places the number of political prisoners at around 600,000. However, if one adds the persons deported, placed under house arrest, interned in labor camps in the Soviet Union etc., the total number of the direct victims of the communist repression raises to approximately 2,000,000 persons. For more on this issue, see Rusan, *Chronology and geography of communist repression in Romania*, 61–62.

solution at hand. This is how a worldview developed within the ranks of the Party, i.e. the illegal RCP, during the interwar years and subsequently in Greater Romania's prisons, was extended to the Party-State level.

Again, this is not to say that Gheorghiu-Dej knew perfectly the language of nationalism. Actually, he did not. Câmpeanu, himself a member of the group from prisons, speaking of the prison spent in prison, argues that the said group was not xenophobic or ethnocentric: "Over the years, I did not observe in that multinational community the slightest sign of interethnic prejudices."³⁷ In fact, Gheorghiu-Dej never referred to the "Romanian nation" in his official speeches. The RWP first secretary did refer to "people" or "motherland," but never to the "nation" as such, although mentions were made to "national economy"³⁸ or "national independence."³⁹ Nonetheless, his recourse to Party-State building in the guise of selective community building created the basis for Ceaușescu's program of Party-State building in the form of an all-embracing nation-building project. As Jowitt aptly puts it: "Given the highly concrete, rigid, hence superficial nature of Gheorghiu-Dej's Marxist-Leninist beliefs, there was a chance that his regime could become nationalistic in the style of historic Romanian nationalism."⁴⁰

It took however, a rather long time until the Party mastered the language of nationalism and fully understood the importance of national ideology. In this respect, the story of Marx's writings about Romanians is telling. The manuscript was discovered in Amsterdam in 1958 but it was published only in 1964, when it became clear that it could serve the Party's policy of independence from Moscow.⁴¹

³⁷ Câmpeanu, *Ceaușescu, the countdown years*, 101.

³⁸ *Resolution of the plenary meeting of the CC of the RWP of 3–5 March 1949*, 7.

³⁹ Gheorghiu-Dej, *30 years of struggle under the flag of Lenin and Stalin*, 5.

⁴⁰ Jowitt, *Revolutionary Breakthroughs and National Development*, 224.

⁴¹ Marx, *Însemnări despre români: Manuscrise inedite* (Notes on the Romanians: Unedited manuscripts) (Bucharest : Editura Academiei Republicii Populare Române, 1964).

Pavel Țugui, a former head of the Scientific and Cultural Section of the CC of the RWP (1955–1960) states clearly in his memoirs that the publication of Marx's writings was part of the new "political strategy and tactics" pursued "discretely but perseveringly by some members of the CC of the RWP" after 1956.⁴² The fact that the regime launched in 1958 a second wave of repression, during which the collectivization process was completed (1962) and which was meant to tame further the population, supports the argument that the Party was not sure of the effects the emerging nationalistic rhetoric would have on the population.⁴³ Actually, it was only on 21 August 1968, when Ceaușescu publicly condemned the invasion of former Czechoslovakia by the troops of five member states of the WTO that the Party could evaluate the force of the nationalistic argument. The immediate result of that event was that the RCP gained widespread popular support almost overnight.

Until Gheorghiu-Dej's death in March 1965, there were two major domestic political events that deserve a closer look: the Plenum of the Central Committee held on 28 November – 5 December 1961 and the Declaration of April 1964. The CC Plenum of November–December 1961 provided a simple but effective description of Party's history since the end of World War II, seen as a struggle between two camps: an autochthonous and patriotic one, and a Soviet-oriented one. Thus, Gheorghiu-Dej claimed that the purges of 1952 (the

⁴² Țugui, *History and Romanian language in Gheorghiu-Dej's times*, 185–86.

⁴³ Rusan, *Chronology and geography of communist repression in Romania*, 31–34. For more on the forced collectivization process, see Gheorghe Iancu, Virgiliu Țărău and Ottmar Trașcă, eds., *Colectivizarea agriculturii în România: Aspecte legislative, 1945–1962* (Collectivization of agriculture in Romania: Legislative aspects, 1945–1962) (Cluj: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2000) and Octavian Roske, Florin Abraham and Dan Cătănuș, eds., *Colectivizarea agriculturii în România: Cadrul legislativ, 1949–1962* (Collectivization of agriculture in Romania: The legal framework, 1949–1962) (Bucharest: Institutul Național pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, 2007).

Pauker-Luca-Teohari group) and 1957 (the Constantinescu-Chișinevschi faction) were the result of a struggle between the proponents of two visions. A first group, led by Gheorghiu-Dej himself, put Romania's interests above everything else. That group was fiercely opposed by a so-called Muscovite group, which served only the interests of the Soviet Union. Subsequent to Gheorghiu-Dej's speech, all the participants to that Plenum were called to reiterate the interpretation of their leader.⁴⁴

Nonetheless, it is important to stress that at the same plenary session of November-December 1961 top communist officials made recurrent references to their "just" stances with regard to Transylvania. Gheorghiu-Dej himself stated bluntly that immediately after World War II, "the chief preoccupation of Rákosi and his group was: 'To whom would Transylvania belong'."⁴⁵ This indicates that the Romanian communist elite was discovering the main ingredients of the nationalist discourse and the reference to the contested territory of Transylvania and the allegedly irredentist stances of Hungarian Stalinists was meant to stress once more the increasingly national line adopted by the RWP after 1956. Transylvania was already conceptualized as an "ethnoscape." As Anthony D. Smith puts it: "Historic 'ethnoscapes' cover a wider extent of land, present a tradition of continuity and are held to constitute an ethnic unity, because the terrain invested with collective significance is felt to be

⁴⁴ After the fall of the Ceaușescu regime in December 1989, Paul Niculescu-Mizil was one the most vocal former *nomenklatura* members in praising Ceaușescu's independent line. Nonetheless, he concedes that the Plenum of 1961 was meant primarily to praise Gheorghiu-Dej and mentions that Ceaușescu was among those who excessively glorified Gheorghiu-Dej. See Paul Niculescu-Mizil, *De la Comintern la comunism național* (From Comintern to national-communism) (Bucharest: Editura Evenimentul Românesc, 2001), 244–245.

⁴⁵ Elis Neagoe-Pleșa and Liviu Pleșa, eds., *Dosarul Ana Pauker: Plenara Comitetului Central al Partidului Muncitoresc Român din 30 noiembrie – 5 decembrie 1961* (The Ana Pauker file: The Plenum of the CC of RWP of 30 November – 5 December 1961) Vol. I (Bucharest: Editura Nemira & CNSAS, 2006), 251.

integral to a particular historical culture community or *ethnie*.”⁴⁶ Thus, it may be argued that in 1961 the shift from a selective community building to a nation-building process was only a matter of inclusion, i.e. of including in the process those citizens who were previously excluded on ideological grounds.

Equally important, at the same plenary meeting some top officials took the opportunity to refer to the 1956 Hungarian revolution in the context of the fierce power struggle within the RWP at that time. Thus, in his speech held on 4 December 1961 in front of the Plenum, János Fazekás, member of the Secretariat of CC of RWP, stated that during the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, Iosif Chişinevschi had an ambiguous position and was reluctant to define the events in Hungary as a “counter-revolution.” It was he, János Fazekás, together with Nicolae Ceauşescu who at the time took the “right” stance and squarely identified the events as a “counter-revolution.” He also stated that Miron Constantinescu, who was sent by the Party to Cluj to speak to the students, did not dare to “unmask” the events in Hungary as a “counter-revolution.”⁴⁷ As shown above, in 1956, in the aftermath of Khrushchev’s “secret speech” Constantinescu, backed by Chişinevschi, criticized Gheorghiu-Dej’s Stalinism, but they lost the battle within the Party and were demoted in 1957. What is important for the present analysis is that in 1961, at the most important Plenum of RWP under the Gheorghiu-Dej regime, Fazekás referred to the 1956 events in Hungary in relation to the fierce power struggle within the RWP. This supports once more the assertion that the 1956 revolution in Hungary had a major impact on Romanian communists’ mindset.

⁴⁶ See Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 150.

⁴⁷ Neagoe-Pleşa and Pleşa, eds., *The Plenum of the CC of RWP of 30 November – 5 December 1961*, Vol. II, 187–88.

The document that epitomizes Gheorghiu-Dej's policy of independence from Moscow was issued in April 1964. Known as the "Declaration of April 1964," that document is one of the RWP's most important official documents. Simply put, the Declaration proclaimed that all communist parties were equal within the international communist movement, and therefore they were free to choose their own path toward communism. The following phrase might be considered the credo of the monolithic and emancipated RWP: "There is no "parent" party and "offspring" party, "superior" and "subordinated" parties, but there is the large family of communist and workers parties having equal rights."⁴⁸ After claiming the right of each and every communist party to decide upon its own strategy of building "socialism," the RWP elite took the major step towards a decisive shift from selective community building to nation-building: the liberation of political prisoners. The general amnesty led to the liberation of the overwhelming majority of political convicts by the end of August 1964.⁴⁹ However, Gheorghiu-Dej did not live long enough to see the results of this major shift. It was Nicolae Ceaușescu who turned Gheorghiu-Dej's incipient ethnic nationalism into consistently chauvinistic policies.

Transition from "selective community-building" to nation-building, 1964–1968

The way Ceaușescu managed to be named as Gheorghiu-Dej's successor is still a matter of debate. Post-1989 witness accounts by former nomenklatura members reveal that Ceaușescu skillfully

⁴⁸ *Declaration concerning the position of the Romanian Workers' Party with regard to the problems of the international communist and workers' movement adopted by the enlarged Plenum of the CC of the RWP of April 1964*, 55.

⁴⁹ Rusan, *Chronology and geography of communist repression in Romania*, 35.

managed to convince some of the most influential members of Gheorghiu-Dej's inner circle of power to support him. Furthermore, it seems that the fear of factionalism played an important role in bringing Ceaușescu to power. At least, this is what one can grasp from the witness account provided after 1989 by Ion Gheorghe Maurer, a prominent nomenklatura member and a key player in Romanian politics under both Gheorghiu-Dej and Ceaușescu. As a lawyer, Maurer defended the communists in a famous trial that took place in 1936. After the communist takeover, he rose to prominence only in 1960 when he was promoted member of the Politburo. From that moment onwards, Maurer's influence within the party increased constantly until he became the most influential person within the party except for Gheorghiu-Dej himself. On 21 March 1961, Maurer was appointed President of the Council of Ministers and held this position without interruption until 27 February 1974, when he was replaced by Manea Mănescu.⁵⁰ In his post-1989 testimony, Maurer claims that Gheorghiu-Dej, already on his deathbed, asked him to propose Apostol as his successor when the Politburo would meet to elect a new secretary general of the RWP. Maurer, however, claims that he decided to support Ceaușescu for two reasons: (1) to avoid a split at the top of the Party; and (2) because he considered Ceaușescu pugnacious enough as to continue the "national line" initiated by Gheorghiu-Dej.⁵¹ The argument put forward by Maurer is in line with the most cherished and shared values at the level of the Romanian communist elite from the establishment of the Party in

⁵⁰ Stelian Neagoe, *Istoria guvernelor României: De la începuturi – 1859 până în zilele noastre – 1995* (A history of Romania's governments: From beginnings – 1859 to the present day – 1995) (Bucharest: Editura Machiavelli, 1995), 181–204.

⁵¹ For Maurer's testimony, see Betea, *Maurer and the yesterday world*, 172–77. For more on Maurer's political biography see Florica Dobre et al., eds., *Members of the CC of the RCP*, 385.

May 1921 and until its demise in December 1989, i.e. monolithism and emancipation.

Let us examine the issues of ideology, cohesion, and leadership style and vision of politics for the case of Ceaușescu. Like his predecessor, Ceaușescu was fully convinced that independence and industrialization were the fundamental elements of Romania's strategy of building "socialism." In terms of foreign policy and relations with the Soviet bloc countries, Ceaușescu followed unabatedly the line set forth by the "Declaration of April 1964." Also, once in power Ceaușescu followed strictly Gheorghiu-Dej's policies regarding the monolithism of the Party. Thus, the statute of the RCP adopted by the Ninth Congress of the Party, held on 19–24 July 1965,⁵² stipulates in its section on the Party members: "Each Party member is obligated to defend firmly the unity and purity of Party's ranks – the major conditions for its unshakeable strength. The Party does not admit the existence of factions within its ranks. Any factional activity represents a crime against the Party and is incompatible with the quality of Party member."⁵³ At the same time, the Ninth Congress of the RCP decided to change the name of the Party from the Romanian Workers Party (RWP) into the Romanian Communist Party (RCP), thus showing that the Romanian party-state in the making had entered a new period of development.

However, Ceaușescu had first to be recognized as the undisputed leader of the RCP. In order to achieve this goal, he emulated the

⁵² See *Congresul al IX-lea al Partidului Comunist Român* (The Ninth Congress of the Romanian Communist Party) (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1965), 16–17.

⁵³ *Statutul Partidului Comunist Român*, Partea a II-a: Membrii de Partid; Secțiunea A: Îndatoriri și drepturi, punctul 2/b (Statute of the Romanian Communist Party, Part II: The Party members; Section A: Duties and rights, pt. 2/b) (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1965), 14–15. See also *Culegere de lecții pentru cursurile și cercurile care studiază Statutul Partidului Comunist Român* (Collection of lessons for the courses and circles that study the Statute of the Romanian Communist Party) (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1966), 69–70.

Khrushchevite platform – which Jowitt concisely defined as “Don’t kill the cadres” – of condemning the crimes committed by his predecessor against Party members in order to consolidate his power.⁵⁴ Thus, after a period of “collective leadership,” i.e. March 1965 – April 1968, Ceaușescu thoroughly staged a Plenum of the Central Committee of the RCP, which was held on 22–25 April 1968. At the said Plenum, Ceaușescu was unequivocal in his disapproval of his predecessor’s abuses against a number of Party members. The Plenum’s agenda was structured on six points: (1) the development of the education system in Romania; (2) an analysis of the Party membership and the level of instruction of the Party members; (3) an appraisal of the Party and state apparatus’ activity in solving citizens’ claims and requests; (4) an analysis of the training level of the armed forces and the problems related to their equipping; (5) the international activity of the RCP; and (6) the rehabilitation of a number of RCP activists.⁵⁵ Point six proved to be the key point of the Plenum, since it was about issuing an official decision of prime importance with regard to the wrongdoings of the Gheorghiu-Dej regime: the “Decision of the CC of the RCP regarding the rehabilitation of a number of Party activists.” This decision deserves a thorough examination because it represents the essence of Romania’s belated and short-lived de-Stalinization, which lasted from April 1968 to July 1971. It is clear by now that the same year he acceded to the supreme position in the Party hierarchy Ceaușescu decided to employ the Khrushchevite strategy mentioned above. (This also supports the idea that, from a psycho-historical perspective, Ceaușescu was more of a planner than an improviser.) Thus, in November 1965 he established a Party commission composed of four members –

⁵⁴ Jowitt, *The Leninist Extinction*, 233.

⁵⁵ *Plenara Comitetului Central al Partidului Comunist Român din 22–25 aprilie 1968* (The Plenum of the CC of the RCP of 22–25 April 1968) (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1968).

Gheorghe Stoica, Vasile Patilineț, Nicolae Guină and Ion Popescu-Puțuri – in charge with examining the “political situation of a number of Party activists” that were arrested or condemned “many years ago.” The archival sources that came to light after 1989 show that the commission organized a series of “hearings,” which looked very much like interrogatories, with those involved in the purges or executions of Party militants, especially during the period 1944–1954. The transcripts that were preserved in the archives reveal not only the mechanisms of the bloody power struggle that was fought within the ranks of the RCP during the said period, but also the fact the main target of the commission was to condemn the misdeeds of the defunct leader, Gheorghiu-Dej, rather than to establish the facts.⁵⁶

The Decision of April 1968 comprised six provisions, which were in fact six indictments of Gheorghiu-Dej’s policies concerning the Party apparatus: (1) the “post-mortem political rehabilitation” of Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu; (2) the “post-mortem political rehabilitation” of Ștefan Foriș; (3) the “post-mortem political rehabilitation” of a number of nineteen former Party activists, as follows: Ecaterina Arbore; Imre Aladar; I. Dic-Dicescu; Tudor Diamandescu; Alexandru Dobrogeanu-Gherea; Elena Filipovici; David Fabian Finkelstein; Dumitru Grofu; Jacques Konitz; Elek Köblos; Leon Lichtblau; Marcel Leonin; Gelber Moscovici (Ghiță Moscu); Alexandru Nicolau; Marcel Pauker; Eugen Rozvan; Alter Zalic; Petre Zissu; and Timotei Marin; (4) the revoking of the Party sanctions issued against eight Party members: Miron Constantinescu; Ion Craiu; Ioan Demeter; Constantin Doncea; Mihai Levente; Vasile Modoran; Dumitru

⁵⁶ For the results of the Party investigation commission, see Section L: *Rezultatele anchetei din 1967–1968* (Results of the investigation of 1967–1968), Docs. 66 to 73, in Gheorghe Buzatu and Mircea Chirițoiu, eds., *Agresiunea comunismului în România: Documente din arhivele secrete, 1944–1989*, Vol. 2 (Communist aggression in Romania: Documents from the secret archives, 1944–1989) (Bucharest: Editura Paideia, 1998), 86–120.

Petrescu; and Aurel Vijoli; (5) that similar cases of other old-timers would be analyzed; and (6) the decision to dismiss Alexandru Drăghici [former head of the Securitate] from the CC of the RCP and to establish the responsibility of those involved in “illegal repressive actions” in order to punish them.⁵⁷ Although it did not have a major impact on the Romanian society in general, the Plenum of April 1968 had a major impact on the Party and the Securitate. It simply showed that the period of “collective leadership” was coming to an end and that Ceaușescu was about to become the undisputed leader of the Party, the one whom the Securitate had to obey absolutely. Nonetheless, Ceaușescu’s major achievement in terms of domestic support for his rule was yet to come: the “charismatic” moment that conferred almost overnight legitimacy to the communist rule in Romania.

Fully fledged nation-building, 1968–1985

August 1968 was a watershed in the history of communist Romania. Nicolae Ceaușescu’s public condemnation of the August 1968 invasion of former Czechoslovakia by the WTO troops under Soviet command had a major influence on the subsequent development of Romanian national-communism and therefore deserves thorough examination. With regard to the relationship between the Romanian Communist Party (RCP) and the Romanian society the year 1968 had a threefold significance, which is best described by three concepts, i.e. legitimacy, nation-building and closure. The political actions taken by the Romanian communists throughout the year 1968 resulted in positive actions expressing consent from the part of large segments of society, which

⁵⁷ See *Hotărîrea C.C. al P.C.R. cu privire la reabilitarea unor activiști de partid* (The decision of the CC of the RCP regarding the rehabilitation of a number of Party activists), in *The Plenum of the CC of the RCP of 22–25 April 1968*, 64–76.

ultimately conferred legitimacy on the single party rule. Ceaușescu's gesture of defiance brought him a broad popular support and silenced the domestic critical voices towards the regime for many years.

In terms of ideology, cohesion of the power elite, and Ceaușescu's leadership style and vision of politics the August 1968 moment had a tremendous importance. First, in the aftermath of Ceaușescu's condemnation of the WTO invasion of Czechoslovakia ethnic nationalism was instrumentalized, and served, as an ideological substitute for the "dying faith" in revolutionary socialism. It may be argued that in August 1968 the period of transition from a process of "selective community-building" to a comprehensive nation-building project aiming at constructing an ethnically homogenous Romanian "socialist" nation came to an end. Second, the events of 1968 contributed decisively in strengthening the unity of the RCP around its supreme leader: up to the very end of communist rule in Romania, no faction would put in danger the unity of the Party. Third, the shift from "selective community-building" to nation-building had enormous consequences on the further development of Ceaușescu's leadership style. Having gained a "limited legitimacy" through popular consent for the RCP rule due to his condemnation of the Soviet-led intervention in Czechoslovakia, Ceaușescu was free to put into practice his rigid political beliefs, which he did stubbornly and inflexibly until 22 December 1989. Therefore, the year 1968 marked also the beginning of the end of the period of relative economic liberalization and closely watched ideological relaxation initiated by Ceaușescu's predecessor, Gheorghiu-Dej, in the early 1960s.

Ceaușescu's official condemnation of the crushing of the Prague Spring and his subsequent rejection of the Brezhnev Doctrine were often interpreted as a display of reformist stances. That it was not so, one can find out only by looking at the way Ceaușescu himself and the Party propaganda machine presented to the Romanian public the events that were taking place in Czechoslovakia. Thus, throughout the period January – August 1968, the reform process that unfolded

in former Czechoslovakia was presented to the Romanian public as a version of the independent-path policies communist Romania was engaged in. Not a single reference was made to the significance of the reforms introduced by the regime of Alexander Dubček. Furthermore, nothing was said about the way the Czecho-Slovak society reacted to the reforms initiated from above, i.e., from the top of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPCz). Let us examine first the unfolding of events.

On 26 January 1968, Ceaușescu turned 50. With the occasion of the “comradely lunch” offered by the CC of the RCP, Ceaușescu delivered a speech in which he referred only to the importance of maintaining the unity of the international working-class movement and stated that Romania was decided “not to participate to any action that would endanger such a unity,” but no reference was made to the changes that had taken place at the top of the CPCz.⁵⁸ The next month, however, representatives of the RCP leadership had the chance to meet in person the new leaders of the CPCz: an official delegation of the RCP went to Prague and participated to the festivities occasioned by the 20th anniversary of the February 1948 coup that brought the communists in power in post-World War II Czechoslovakia. On 22 February, in his speech, Ceaușescu referred to the “unshakeable alliance” between the two “socialist states.” Ceaușescu also referred to the need to strengthen the “cohesion of the international working-class movement.” Interestingly enough, in his speech Ceaușescu made use of the term *normalization* when he spoke about the necessity of “normalizing the relationships between communist parties on the basis of equality and mutual respect

⁵⁸ Ceaușescu’s speech is reproduced in Nicolae Ceaușescu, *România pe drumul desăvârșirii construcției socialiste: Rapoarte, cuvântări, articole: ianuarie 1968 – martie 1969* (Romania on the road towards completing the building of socialism: Reports, speeches, articles: January 1968 – March 1969) (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1969), 37–38.

principles.”⁵⁹ At the same time, one should assess what stayed behind the stereotypical phrases rooted in the “wooden language” of the Romanian supreme leader and find out what the leadership in Bucharest really thought about the political changes in Czechoslovakia. In this respect, the witness accounts by former nomenklatura members could be useful. Officially, Ceaușescu expressed in Prague his trust in the “Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, headed by its First Secretary, comrade Alexander Dubček.” Unofficially, however, it seems that Ceaușescu had doubts with regard to the person of Dubček, whom he considered far too lenient and “lacking a clear and firm personal stance.” At least, this is what a top nomenklatura member, Dumitru Popescu, who would become the RCP chief ideologue, remembers.⁶⁰

During the spring of 1968 Ceaușescu was extremely busy. After the carefully staged Plenum of April, which was discussed above, he received the visit of the French president, Charles de Gaulle (14–18 May 1968). Then, on 27 May–1 June, Ceaușescu paid another visit to Yugoslavia and held talks with the Yugoslav leader, Josip Broz Tito. In his official speeches, Ceaușescu referred, time and again, to the fact that all communist parties were equal within the international communist movement and that they were free to choose their own path toward communism, and emphasized the need to observe the principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of a “fraternal”

⁵⁹ Ceaușescu, “Cuvînt de salut la festivitățile de la Praga consacrate celei de-a 20-a aniversări a victoriei oamenilor muncii din Cehoslovacia din februarie 1948” (Greeting speech at the festivities dedicated to the 20th anniversary of the victory of the working people of Czechoslovakia of February 1948) in idem, *Reports, speeches, articles: January 1968 – March 1969*, 80–84.

⁶⁰ See Dumitru Popescu, *Un fost lider comunist se destăinuie: “Am fost și cioplitor de himere”* (A former communist leader confesses: “I was also a carver of chimeras”) (Bucharest: Editura Expres, n.d.), 142. For more on the political biography of Dumitru Popescu, nicknamed “Dumnezeu,” i.e., “the Almighty,” see Florica Dobre et al., eds., *The members of the CC of the RCP*, 480–81.

party. During his visit to Yugoslavia, for instance, Ceaușescu stressed these ideas in his speeches of 27 and 29 of May.⁶¹ Nonetheless, it was not until mid-July 1968 that he spoke openly about the right of Czecho-Slovak communists of pursuing their own path towards “socialism.” For the ordinary Romanians, it was clear that something was happening in Czechoslovakia and that the Romanian communists were supportive of CPCz’s initiatives. The Party newspaper *Scînteia* wrote constantly about the political changes in Czechoslovakia. However, no reference was made to official documents of paramount importance, such as the Action Program of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (10 April 1968), which indicated to a large extent the direction of the reforms envisaged by CPCz. Furthermore, nothing was said about the reaction of the Czechoslovak society in general to the reforms introduced from above. For instance, the “Two Thousand Words” manifesto of 27 June 1968 was not commented by the Romanian press.⁶²

Documents from the archive of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicate that the Romanian embassy in Prague was sending to Bucharest timely and comprehensive reports on the pace of changes in Czechoslovakia. Therefore, it is reasonable to argue that Ceaușescu was aware of the real situation in Prague and of the way some segments of the Czechoslovak society – most prominently the students – were responding to the reforms initiated by the CPCz. For instance, in a telegram sent to Bucharest on 23 March 1968 it was mentioned that among Czechoslovak students there were signaled “inappropriate manifestations” such as requests for renouncing to

⁶¹ See Ceaușescu’s speeches delivered at the official dinner offered by President Tito (27 May 1968) and with the occasion of his visit to the town of Krani (29 May 1968) in Nicolae Ceaușescu, *Reports, speeches, articles: January 1968 – March 1969*, esp. p. 241 and 249.

⁶² For a collection of documents related to the Prague Spring and its suppression by the Soviet-led intervention see Jaromír Navrátil et al., eds., *The Prague Spring 1968* (Budapest: CEU Press, 1998).

the leading role of the CPCz, hostile statements concerning the army or wishes that Czechoslovakia would pursue a policy of neutrality.⁶³ Such critical stances by students and intellectuals in Prague did not escape to communist leaders like Władysław Gomułka or János Kádár, who had learned from the lessons of 1956. Thus, at the Dresden Meeting, held also on 23 March, Gomułka stated: “Why shouldn’t we draw conclusions from the experience which we acquired in 1956 in Poland? Why not draw conclusions from what happened in Hungary? That all began in a similar way, comrades. In our country and in Hungary everything began with the writers.” For his part, Kádár warned: “The Czechoslovak comrades know best, I believe, what is happening in Czechoslovakia today. But the process we observe, what we see and hear, and what we do not yet see – permit me to explain – this process is extremely similar to the prologue of the Hungarian counterrevolution at a time when it had not yet become a counterrevolution. This means that is the process that took place in Hungary from February 1956 to the end of October.”⁶⁴

It should be stressed once again that in his speeches Ceaușescu presented the situation in Czechoslovakia as mirroring the one in Romania. Ordinary Romanians were told that the Czechoslovak communists, largely supported by the population, were determined to pursue their own, independent path towards “socialism” and that the communist parties of Bulgaria, Hungary, East Germany, Poland and Soviet Union were not happy with that.⁶⁵ Beginning in mid-July,

⁶³ Mihai Retegan, 1968 – *Din primăvară pînă în toamnă: Schiță de politică externă românească* (1968 – From spring till autumn: An outline of Romanian foreign policy) (Bucharest: Editura RAO, 1998), 96–97.

⁶⁴ See Document No. 14: “Stenographic Account of the Dresden Meeting, March 23, 1968 (Excerpts)” in Navrátil et al., eds., *The Prague Spring 1968*, 67, 69.

⁶⁵ For instance, during the month of July 1968, the Party newspaper *Scînteia* published news about the situation in Czechoslovakia in its issues of 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22 and 24 July, which amounts to 18 issues. One has to mention that *Scînteia* did not appear on Mondays.

however, Ceaușescu referred constantly to the situation in Czechoslovakia and stressed consistently that the CPCz had the right to decide by itself upon its way of building “socialism.” Thus, on 15 July, during his visit to the Galați Steel Combine, Ceaușescu delivered a speech in which he stated:

Our people and the RCP do not share the view of those who are worried by the unfolding of events in Czechoslovakia and who consider that one should intervene in the processes of perfecting the socialist society that are taking place in Czechoslovakia. We fully trust the CPCz ... and the Czech and Slovak peoples and we are convinced that under the lead of their communist party ... they know how to build socialism in Czechoslovakia in accordance with their wishes and aspirations. We wholeheartedly wish them success.⁶⁶

During the month of August, Ceaușescu took every opportunity to display the RCP's support for the CPCz. Thus, on 11 August, he delivered a speech to the celebration of Miner's Day (*Ziua minerului*) and the Hundredth Anniversary of the establishment of mining industry in the Jiu Valley. With that occasion, Ceaușescu stated once again that the RCP expressed from the very beginning its conviction that the actions taken by the CPCz were directed towards “building of socialism” in that country and would “consolidate and develop the revolutionary achievements of the Czech and Slovak peoples.”⁶⁷ Then, on 14 August, Ceaușescu took part to the graduation ceremony at the Military Academy. He took the opportunity to address the

⁶⁶ Ceaușescu, “Cuvîntare la mitingul de la Combinatul siderurgic din Galați – 15 iulie 1968” (Speech delivered at the meeting at the Galați Steel Combine – 15 July 1968) in idem, *Reports, speeches, articles: January 1968 – March 1969*, 327–28.

⁶⁷ Ceaușescu, “Cuvîntare la sărbătorirea Zilei minerului și a Centenarului industriei carbonifere din Valea Jiului – 11 august 1968” (Speech delivered to the celebration of Miner's Day and the Hundredth Anniversary of the establishment of mining industry in the Jiu Valley) in idem, *Reports, speeches, articles: January 1968 – March 1969*, 353–55.

graduates and share his views about national armed forces and their role within the Warsaw Treaty Organization framework:

The command of armed forces cannot be exercised by an institution from abroad; this is the inalienable right of the leadership of our party and our state.... There can be no justification to admit, in any way, the use of armed forces to intervene in the internal affairs of a WTO member country. The solving of domestic problems belongs exclusively to the party and people of each country and any kind of interference can only do harm to the cause of socialism, friendship and collaboration among the socialist countries.⁶⁸

In his speech, the supreme leader of the Romanian communists also announced that in the near future a RCP delegation would pay an official visit to Czechoslovakia. Indeed, the Romanian delegation, led by Ceaușescu himself, visited Prague during the period 15–17 August. On 16 August, during a visit to the *Avia* plant, apart from praising the collaboration between the Czechoslovak plant and the Brașov Truck Enterprise, he reiterated that the RCP was fully supporting the CPCz: “As dear friends and comrades, we wish you to completely succeed in your efforts towards the multilateral development of socialist Czechoslovakia and we assure you with this occasion of the solidarity and the fraternal internationalist support of Romanian communists and the entire Romanian people.”⁶⁹ The

⁶⁸ Ceaușescu, “Cuvîntare la Adunarea festivă din Capitală cu prilejul absolvirii promoției 1968 a Academiei Militare Generale și acordării gradului de ofițer absolvenților școlilor militare – 14 august 1968” (Speech delivered at the Bucharest festive meeting occasioned by the graduation of the 1968 contingent of the Military Academy and conferring the rank of officer to the graduates of military schools – 14 August 1968) in idem, *Reports, speeches, articles: January 1968 – March 1969*, 365–66.

⁶⁹ Ceaușescu, “Cuvîntare la mitingul de la uzinele Avia din Praga – 16 august 1968” (Speech delivered to the rally at the Avia plant in Prague – 16 August 1968) in idem, *Reports, speeches, articles: January 1968 – March 1969*, 385–86.

same day, 16 August, it was signed the “Treaty of friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance between the Socialist Republic of Romania and the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic” (*Tratatul de prietenie, colaborare și asistență mutuală dintre Republica Socialistă România și Republica Socialistă Cehoslovacă*). Ceaușescu took the opportunity to express once more his support for the course pursued by the Czech and Slovak communists.⁷⁰

About his visit to Prague and the alleged wholehearted approval by RCP of CPCz policies, Ceaușescu spoke in public on 20 August, when he inaugurated the Pitești Automobile Plant (*Uzina de Autoturisme Pitești*), which would produce the most popular car in Romania, *Dacia*. The following fragment of his speech is telling:

During the visit, with the occasion of the talks we had, we could observe with complete satisfaction that the CPCz, its leadership, the Czechoslovak government, the working class, Czechoslovak peasantry, the intellectuals, the entire people are unabatedly putting into practice the Party policy of building socialism and of developing Czechoslovakia on the path of socialism, in order to ensure a bright future for the working people. We have been profoundly impressed. We have returned with an even stronger conviction that the destinies of socialism and of Czechoslovak people are in safe hands, in the hands of the communist party and of its leadership, and that the Czechoslovak people is a wonderful friend of ours in our common struggle for socialism.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Ceaușescu, “Cuvîntare la solemnitatea semnării Tratatului de prietenie, colaborare și asistență mutuală între Republica Socialistă România și Republica Socialistă Cehoslovacă – 16 august 1968” (Speech delivered to the ceremony of signing the Treaty of friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance between the Socialist Republic of Romania and the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic) in idem, *Reports, speeches, articles: January 1968 – March 1969*, 391–95.

⁷¹ Ceaușescu, “Cuvîntare la mitingul organizat la inaugurarea Uzinei de Autoturisme Pitești – 20 august 1968” (Speech delivered at the rally occasioned by the inauguration of the Pitești Automobile Plant) in idem, *Reports, speeches, articles: January 1968 – March 1969*, 411–12.

The fact that the supreme leader of the RCP was ready to bear witness of the fact that the “destinies of socialism and the Czechoslovak people” stayed firmly in safe hands could not change the decision already taken “from above and abroad.” On the night of 20 to 21 August 1968, WTO troops under Soviet command invaded Czechoslovakia and put an end to the Prague Spring.

On 21 August 1968, from the balcony of the building of CC of the RCP, Nicolae Ceaușescu addressed the crowds gathered in front of the building. His discourse, highly patriotic and with strong anti-Soviet accents, created a particular state of mind among large segments of the population that seemed to forget about the open wounds of the past two decades of single party rule in Romania:

The incursion in Czechoslovakia of the troops belonging to the five socialist countries represents a big mistake and a serious threat to peace in Europe and for the destiny of socialism in the world. It is inconceivable in the present day world – when peoples rise to defend their national independence and for equal rights – that a socialist state, that socialist states infringe on the liberty and independence of another state. *There can be no excuse, and there can be no reason to accept, even for a single moment, the idea of a military intervention in the domestic affairs of a fraternal socialist state* [emphasis added].⁷²

The significance of Ceaușescu’s “balcony speech” of 21 August 1968 is analyzed below in accordance with the three concepts mentioned above: legitimacy; nation-building; and closure. Thus, during the period March 1965 – August 1968, regime perceptions from below improved gradually due to Ceaușescu’s foreign policy of independence from Moscow and opening towards the West, as well as due to his domestic policies of relative economic and ideological

⁷² Ceaușescu’s speech of 21 August 1968 was published by the Party daily *Scînteia* No. 7802 (Thursday, 22 August 1968), 1. The speech was also published in Ceaușescu, *Reports, speeches, articles, January 1968 – March 1969*, 415–18.

relaxation. The slight improvement of the standard of living of the population found an echo in the hearts and minds of a majority of Romania's population. Thus, in August 1968 – ten years after the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Romania – when Ceaușescu gave his famous “balcony speech” in which he condemned the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the WTO troops, large segments of the population supported him without hesitation. The effect of Ceaușescu's discourse on Romania's population was enormous. That speech represented for many Romanians the “proof” of Ceaușescu's charismatic qualifications.⁷³ It may be argued that Ceaușescu's “charismatic leadership,” to use Reinhard Bendix's concept, occurred in the dramatic conditions of that August 1968.⁷⁴ At the same time, this author agrees with David Beetham, who has argued that the use of the Weberian concept of “charismatic authority” is problematic in the sense that it “assigns far too exclusive an importance to the individual, and leads to fruitless, because unresolvable, disputes about whether particular leaders possess the indefinable quality of ‘charisma’ or not.”⁷⁵ Therefore, in order to understand the mechanism that provided the Ceaușescu regime with unprecedented mobilizing capacity one should consider not only Ceaușescu's personality and leadership style, but also the particular circumstances in which popular mobilization occurred.

With regard to Ceaușescu's personality and leadership style, one has to mention that he was by far less flexible in adopting various policies than his predecessor, Gheorghiu-Dej. As it will be further

⁷³ According to Max Weber, charisma is: “A certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities.” Quoted in Reinhard Bendix, “Reflections on Charismatic Leadership,” in Reinhard Bendix et. al., eds., *State and Society: A Reader in Comparative Sociology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 619.

⁷⁴ Bendix, “Reflections on Charismatic Leadership,” 616–29.

⁷⁵ David Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power* (London: Macmillan, 1991), 156.

shown, Ceaușescu was also less imaginative and his ideological commitment to the main tenets of Marxism-Leninism remained strong. Nonetheless, he was only 47 when he became secretary general of the RCP and managed to build a positive image of himself as a “man of the people” by proceeding consistently to grassroots consultations. One can easily grasp the extent of the phenomenon from the large number of domestic mass rallies analyzed above only for the period January-August 1968. During the period 1965–1968, Ceaușescu’s domestic visits were carefully staged and in many instances he also visited the most relevant historic monuments in the respective area, thus paying respect to the deeds of the ancestors with an emphasis on the medieval rulers of Romanian principalities. This was in sharp contrast with the leadership style of his predecessor, Gheorghiu-Dej, who did not champion such staged domestic visits. Furthermore, the launch of his belated and short lived de-Stalinization – which was intended primarily to unmask the wrongdoings of Gheorghiu-Dej and damage his legacy among the nomenklatura members – made of Ceaușescu the undisputed leader of the RCP.

Regarding the mobilizing power of Ceaușescu’s actions, it was his policy of independence from Moscow and opening toward the West – which was initiated in fact by Gheorghiu-Dej – that contributed decisively to the mass mobilization that followed his speech of 21 August. In this respect, Ceaușescu benefited largely from the line inaugurated by Gheorghiu-Dej. Let us examine some recollections by critical intellectuals, some of whom became after 1977 fierce political opponents of the supreme leader of the RCP. Writer Paul Goma, the initiator of the 1977 Goma movement for human rights and perhaps the most famous Romanian dissident, wrote about the atmosphere in Bucharest on 21 August 1968. According to Goma, Ceaușescu’s appeal to the population to take arms and defend their country had a tremendous mobilizing force.⁷⁶ Writer Dumitru

⁷⁶ Paul Goma, *Amnezia la români* (Amnezia to Romanians) (Bucharest: Editura Litera, 1992), 54.

Țepeneag remembers that Ceaușescu's discourse had an instantaneous effect on him: "For some days, I was a convinced Ceaușescuist."⁷⁷ A bitter confession by journalist Neculai Constantin Munteanu, who became one of the most acerbic critics of Ceaușescu's dictatorship as part of the Romanian desk of Radio Free Europe during the 1980s, deserves further examination. In 1977, Munteanu addressed a letter to Ceaușescu himself, in which he stated that he had decided to leave Romania for ever and put forward his main reasons for making such a decision. In his letter, Munteanu also mentioned that on 21 August 1968, while he was in front of the CC building and listened to Ceaușescu's speech, he felt proud of being a Romanian: "The vehemence of your condemnation of the armed aggression of some member countries of the WTO against a friendly and allied country made me feel proud of being a Romanian."⁷⁸ There were some simple themes, such as the struggle for independence and return to traditional values that found an echo in the minds and hearts of a majority of the Romanian population. At the same time, there were some things that people could experience on an everyday basis such as: a cautious ideological relaxation, a slight improvement of the living standards and an opening towards the West. In 1968, things seemed to move in the right direction, and many felt that the RCP leadership was truly concerned with improving the general situation of the population. Such a widespread positive perception of the regime permitted the RCP to achieve a "limited legitimation through consent."⁷⁹ Moreover, the "balcony speech" – which was generally perceived as a "proof" of Ceaușescu's charismatic qualifications – was given at the beginnings of his rule. At the same time, as Max Weber

⁷⁷ Dumitru Țepeneag, *Reîntoarcerea fiului la sânul mamei răătăcite* (The return of the son to prodigal mother's breast) (Iași: Institutul European, 1993), 95.

⁷⁸ See Neculai Constantin Munteanu, *Ultimii șapte ani de-acasă: Un ziarist în dosarele Securității* (The last seven years from home: A journalist in the files of the Securitate) (Bucharest: Editura Curtea Veche, 2007), 120.

⁷⁹ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 117.

puts it, if a charismatic leader “is for long unsuccessful, above all if his leadership fails to benefit his followers, it is likely that his charismatic authority will disappear.”⁸⁰ It took, however, more than ten years for Ceaușescu’s charisma to erode.

Under Ceaușescu’s rule, the RCP engaged in a sustained policy of reinforcing the ethnic ties among the Romanian majority and assimilating the historic ethnic minorities. In this respect, 1968 was also a watershed. As shown above, it was Gheorghiu-Dej who initiated after 1956 a return to the local traditions and thus to an ethnic understanding of the nation. However, Ceaușescu’s predecessor, who applied random terror in order to Sovietize the country, only managed to engage in a process of “selective community-building.” Faced with Khrushchev’s de-Stalinization campaign, the Romanian communist elite discovered that national identity is a crucial social and political resource and made use of it in order to ensure their political survival. The Romanian Stalinists, however, did not master the language of nationalism and it took them some eight years (1956–1964) to understand fully the extraordinary force of nationalism as an instrument for preserving their absolute power. It was only from 1964 onwards that the process of building selectively a political community was turned gradually into an all-encompassing nation-building process. In 1964, the political prisoners were eventually liberated. Since no major segments of the population were left out anymore, it seemed that the preconditions for engaging in a comprehensive, “socialist” nation-building project were set. But one thing was still missing: the consent of the ruled. Gheorghiu-Dej tamed the society through random terror, then distanced himself from Moscow and returned to traditional values in order to avoid de-Stalinization. As already discussed, in April 1964 it was issued a “declaration of independence” and the political prisoners were liberated.

⁸⁰ Quoted in Bendix, “Reflections on Charismatic Leadership,” 620.

Nonetheless, the RCP had a legitimacy problem, which was solved only in August 1968.

After condemning the WTO invasion of Czechoslovakia from the balcony of the building of the CC of the RCP, Ceaușescu started what might be termed as the *itineraries of national cohesion*, meant to provide popular backing to the independent policies of the RCP. Since the events unfolded rapidly, a brief event-centered account would be useful for a better understanding of the context. On 21 August 1968 Ceaușescu delivered his famous “balcony speech,” condemning the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the WTO troops. The next day, 22 August 1968, the Romanian Grand National Assembly – GNA (*Marea Adunare Națională*) was convoked for an extraordinary session. In his speech in the front of the GNA, Ceaușescu stated: “In our opinion, a big and tragic mistake, with heavy consequences upon the fate of the unity of the socialist system and the international communist and workers’ movement, occurred.”⁸¹ Two days later, on 24 August, Ceaușescu paid another visit to Yugoslavia and held talks with Tito. (Ceaușescu had already visited Yugoslavia on 27 May–1 June that year).⁸²

Then, on 26 August 1968 Ceaușescu initiated an ample program of domestic visits. Transylvania was the prime target of regime’s propagandistic efforts. During a single day, 26 August 1968, he visited three counties, Brașov, Harghita and Covasna, and took part to four mass rallies in the towns of Brașov, Sfântu Gheorghe,

⁸¹ The same day, the GNA adopted a document whose importance was equaled only by that of the “Declaration of April 1964:” *Declarația Marii Adunări Naționale a R.S.R. cu privire la principiile de bază ale politicii externe a României* (Declaration of the Grand National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Romania regarding the fundamental principles of Romania’s foreign policy). See *Principiile de bază ale politicii externe a României* (The fundamental principles of Romania’s foreign policy) (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1968).

⁸² Florin Constantiniu, *O istorie sinceră a poporului român* (A sincere history of the Romanian people) (Bucharest: Editura Univers Enciclopedic, 1997), 509–510.

Miercurea Ciuc and Odorheiul Secuiesc. In two of the counties visited, the counties of Harghita and Covasna, the majority of the population is ethnic Hungarian. It seems that, following the lesson of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, Ceaușescu feared in those days of August 1968 that the WTO invasion of Czechoslovakia would stir unrest among the Hungarian-speaking population of Romania. It should be added that in February 1968 the RCP proceeded to an administrative re-organization of the country's territory by renouncing to the Soviet-type organization into regions (*regiuni*) and districts (*raioane*) and a return to the traditional organization into counties (*județe*) and communes (*comune*). More importantly, through the new administrative organization the existence of the Hungarian Autonomous Region (*Regiunea Autonomă Maghiară*) came to an end.⁸³ It was replaced by three counties, Covasna, Harghita and Mureș, a situation that angered the ethnic Hungarian population that perceived the measure as a step towards its assimilation. Consequently, Ceaușescu had good reasons to fear that the Hungarian minority in Romania would speculate the international context and fight for its rights.

It is reasonable to argue that this was the case since at the mass rallies in the towns of Sfântu Gheorghe, Miercurea Ciuc and Odorheiul Secuiesc, Ceaușescu ended his speeches by saying a few words in Hungarian. It must be added that it was the only occasion

⁸³ The Hungarian Autonomous Region was established through *Decree No. 12 of 10 January 1956* and reconfirmed by the *Law for the modification of the Constitution of 27 December 1960*. The 1968 administrative organization was established by the *Law concerning the administrative organization of the territory of the Socialist Republic of Romania of 16 February 1968*. For more on this see Ioan Silviu Nistor, *Comuna și județul, factori ai civilizației românești unitare: Evoluția istorică* (The commune and the county, factors of unitary development of the Romanian civilization: The historical evolution) (Cluj: Editura Dacia, 2000), 131–37 and Ioniță Anghel et al., *Județele României Socialiste* (Counties of Socialist Romania) (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1969).

when Ceaușescu strove to speak in the Hungarian language.⁸⁴ With regard to the revival of historical myths in order to stir popular support for RCP's policies, one mass rally was of paramount importance: the rally held on 30 August 1968 in the Transylvanian city of Cluj. That day, Ceaușescu delivered a flamboyant speech in front of a numerous audience. In that speech, Ceaușescu referred for the first time to the RCP as the direct continuator of the heroic deeds of the Romanian medieval rulers such as *Ștefan cel Mare* (Stephen the Great), *Mircea cel Bătrîn* (Mircea the Old) and *Mihai Viteazul* (Michael the Brave).⁸⁵ It should be stressed once again that Ceaușescu made appreciable efforts to lure Romania's national minorities and convince them that the RCP policy towards minorities was not aimed at their assimilation. In this respect, it is telling that a new series of domestic visits was organized during the period 20–21 September 1968 in another ethnically mixed region of Romania: the Banat. With that occasion, Ceaușescu visited another three counties, Caraș-Severin, Timiș and Arad, and delivered speeches at the mass rallies organized in the cities of Reșița, Timișoara and Arad.⁸⁶ Thus, from

⁸⁴ See Ceaușescu, "Cuvîntare la mitingul din municipiul Brașov – 26 august 1968" (Speech delivered at the mass rally in the city of Brașov – 26 August 1968); "Cuvîntare la mitingul din orașul Sfîntu Gheorghe – 26 august 1968" (Speech delivered at the mass rally in the town of Sfîntu Gheorghe – 26 August 1968); "Cuvîntare la mitingul din orașul Miercurea Ciuc – 26 august 1968" (Speech delivered at the mass rally in the town of Miercurea Ciuc – 26 August 1968); and "Cuvîntare la mitingul din municipiul Odorheiul Secuiesc – 26 august 1968" (Speech delivered at the mass rally in the town of Odorheiul Secuiesc – 26 August 1968), in idem, *Reports, speeches, articles: January 1968 – March 1969*, 422–30, 431–38, 439–48, and 449–54.

⁸⁵ Ceaușescu, "Cuvîntare la marea adunare populară din municipiul Cluj – 30 august 1968" (Speech delivered at the mass rally in the city of Cluj – 30 August 1968), in idem, *Reports, speeches, articles: January 1968 – March 1969*, 478.

⁸⁶ Ceaușescu, "Cuvîntare la mitingul de la Reșița – 20 septembrie 1968" (Speech delivered at the mass rally in the city of Reșița – 20 September 1968); "Cuvîntare la mitingul de la Timișoara – 20 septembrie 1968" (Speech delivered at the mass

September 1968 onwards the emphasis on independence and unity, as well as the cult of ancestors and the manipulation of national symbols became the main ingredients of “Ceaușescuism.”

Another proof of Ceaușescu’s commitment to pursuing independent policies within the Soviet bloc was his public refusal of the Brezhnev Doctrine. Ceaușescu made his refusal of the Brezhnev Doctrine plain on 29 November 1968 in the front of the Romanian Grand National Assembly gathered in a special session to celebrate fifty years from the union of Transylvania with Romania on 1 December 1918. In his speech, Ceaușescu resolutely criticized the concept of “limited sovereignty” applied to the relations between communist countries:

The thesis that one tries to validate lately, according to which the common defense of the socialist countries against an imperialistic attack presupposes the limitation or renunciation to the sovereignty of a state participating to the [Warsaw] Treaty, does not correspond to the principles characterizing the relations between socialist states and under no circumstances may be accepted. The affiliation to the Warsaw Treaty Organization not only that does not question the sovereignty of the member states, that does not “limit” in a way or another their state independence, but, on the contrary, as the Treaty stipulates, is a means of strengthening the national independence and sovereignty of each participating state.⁸⁷

rally in the city of Timișoara – 20 September 1968); and “Cuvîntare la mitingul de la Arad – 21 septembrie 1968” (Speech delivered at the mass rally in the city of Arad – 21 September 1968), in idem, *Reports, speeches, articles: January 1968 – March 1969*, 506–516; 517–21 and 521–31.

⁸⁷ Ceaușescu, “Expunere la ședința jubiliară a Marii Adunări Naționale consacrată sărbătoririi semicentenarului unirii Transilvaniei cu România – 29 noiembrie 1968” (Speech delivered at the special session of the Grand National Assembly dedicated to the celebration of fifty years since the unification of Transylvania with Romania – 29 November 1968), in idem, *Reports, speeches, articles: January 1968 – March 1969*, 745–746.

Thus, the Romanian national-communism reached its full development only in the aftermath of Ceaușescu's "balcony speech" of 21 August 1968. This was due to the fact that in those days the RCP could safely claim that it was the continuator of the political traditions of the three Romanian principalities and, what is more, it was perceived as such by large segments of the population.

That August 1968, however, nobody was really thinking that from the mid-1970s onwards the situation in Romania would decline rapidly and that in the mid-1980s the standard of living of the population would rank among the lowest in Sovietized Europe. On the contrary, at the time many believed that 1968 was only the beginning of a period of even more economic liberalization and ideological relaxation. Mobilized by Ceaușescu's bold condemnation of the repression of the Prague Spring, there were not many those who paid attention to the ideological orthodoxy of the secretary general of the RCP, which was expressed publicly in numerous instances even before 21 August 1968.

It would be thus interesting to examine some of Ceaușescu's public statements that were subsequently transformed into political actions. One can observe that, apart from the special emphasis put on independence there were not many signs of reform communism in the political thought of Ceaușescu. In fact, Ceaușescu consistently followed the principles put forward in his Report to the Ninth Congress of the RCP (19 July 1965). A phrase from Ceaușescu's discourse epitomizes his political credo: "Free and master of its fate, following unabatedly its well-versed shepherd, the Party of the communists, the Romanian people raises its motherland higher and higher to the peaks of socialism, well-being and happiness."⁸⁸ One can argue that the underlying meaning of Ceaușescu's statement was

⁸⁸ Ceaușescu, *Raport la cel de-al IX-lea Congres al Partidului Comunist Român – 19 iulie 1965* (Report to the Ninth Congress of the RCP – 19 July 1965 (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1965), 6.

that the RCP should be left to lead the country according to its wish, without any external interference. Interestingly enough, there was at least one principle, also enounced by Ceaușescu in his 1965 Report, to which the secretary general renounced after 1968, i.e., the principle of “collective leadership and labor.” To this one can add the idea of “abandoning any tendency of subjectivism in evaluating the cadre,” emphasized by Ceaușescu in 1965, but to which he also renounced gradually after 1968, when he started to rely increasingly on his relatives.⁸⁹

References to Stalinist methods of mass mobilization; “systemization” of the national territory; return to autochthonous values in the sphere of culture, were all present in the discourses of the general secretary of the RCP throughout the year 1968. The same year, the RCP proceeded to the reorganization of the secret police, the infamous Securitate, which was ordered to put a stronger emphasis on the recruitment of intellectuals as informal collaborators. Some examples would be telling in this respect. For instance, on 10 February 1968, in a speech at the National Meeting of the Union of Communist Youth (*Uniunea Tineretului Comunist* – UTC), Ceaușescu proposed the reviving of the “traditions of voluntary labor” and the re-opening of the “national youth worksites,” characteristic of the early Stalinist period, as means of “revolutionary” education of the young generation.⁹⁰ On 15 February, the Grand National Assembly – GNA held an extraordinary session to which Ceaușescu presented the project of administrative reorganization of the territory (which was already discussed above).⁹¹ Then, on 17 February,

⁸⁹ Ceaușescu, *Report to the Ninth Congress*, 72, 74.

⁹⁰ Ceaușescu, *Reports, speeches, articles: January 1968 – March 1969*, 50–53.

⁹¹ Ceaușescu, “Expunere cu privire la îmbunătățirea organizării administrative a teritoriului Republicii Socialiste România – 15 februarie 1968” (Exposé concerning the betterment of the administrative organization of the territory of the Socialist Republic of Romania – 15 February 1968), in idem, *Reports, speeches, articles: January 1968 – March 1969*, 5–19.

Ceaușescu visited the Prahova county, which, according to the new administrative organization of the territory, was among the largest ones. With that occasion, Ceaușescu spoke about the necessity of making use rationally of the arable land and of reducing the constructed areas of towns and villages: “Leaving aside wasteful architectonic extravaganzas, let us use our imagination and skill for economizing the wealth of the people by erecting nice and inexpensive buildings, and by *reducing as much as possible the constructed areas of towns and villages* [emphasis added].”⁹² Such an assertion indicates that the RCP supreme leader already had in mind a plan to “systemize” the territory of the country. As far as the sphere of culture was concerned, the general secretary of the RCP also had strong ideas about it. Thus, on 19 April 1968, Ceaușescu spoke at the National Conference of the Union of Plastic Artists in Romania and stated: “During the conference it has been stressed that the artist must be devoted body and soul to serving the interests of their socialist motherland, that their highest ideal is to create an art of this country, of this people, an art that responds to the necessities of this glorious moment that Romania experiences.”⁹³

Last, but by no means least, one should discuss the way the activity of the communist secret police, the much feared Securitate, was reorganized after the Plenum of April 1968. As shown above, the Plenum was carefully staged and represented a frontal attack by the secretary general of the RCP on the legacy of the previous supreme leader of the Party. Thus, Ceaușescu accused Gheorghiu-Dej of wrongdoings with regard to a number of actions taken against Party

⁹² Ceaușescu, “Cuvîntare la adunarea activului de partid din județul Prahova – 17 februarie 1968” (Speech delivered at the meeting of the Party cadre from the Prahova county – 17 February 1968) in idem, *Reports, speeches, articles: January 1968 – March 1969*, 67.

⁹³ Ceaușescu, “Cuvîntare la Conferința pe țară a Uniunii Artiștilor Plastici – 19 aprilie 1968” (Speech at the National Conference of the Union of the Plastic Artists), in idem, *Reports, speeches, articles: January 1968 – March 1969*, 153.

members. In fact, it was about the way Gheorghiu-Dej got rid of his rivals from within the Party. Of course, being part of the “group from prisons” Ceaușescu knew perfectly well what was happening at the time. Another target of the April 1968 Plenum was Alexandru Drăghici, former head of the Securitate, whom Ceaușescu hated. Furthermore, as recent research has shown, beginning in 1967 the Securitate underwent a transformation which culminated with the appointment of Ion Stănescu – a Party activist quite close to Ceaușescu – as its head (May 1968 – April 1972). At the same time, one should note that the reorganization of the Securitate also meant the promotion of officers with higher education, as well as the inclusion of a significant number of intellectuals among its informal collaborators.⁹⁴ Although the methods of the Securitate shifted from sheer repression to prevention, its scope never changed. In this respect, it is worth mentioning the bitter remark of Neculai Constantin Munteanu: “Back then, in August 1968, in my patriotic euphoria, I did not pay much attention to the placards with slogans that read: ‘Ceaușescu – RCP,’ ‘Ceaușescu – Romania,’ ‘Ceaușescu and the people.’ A very few could have imagined at the time that those placards were only the prelude to a future and violent recrudescence of the personality cult.”⁹⁵ Unfortunately, that August 1968 a majority of the population, including former political prisoners, were misled by Ceaușescu’s stance.

Ceaușescu’s gesture of defiance not only brought him a broad popular support, but also permitted him to portray himself as a “dissenter” within the Soviet bloc, which undermined the domestic

⁹⁴ For more on this see Elis Neagoe-Pleșa, “1968 – Anul reformării agenturii Securității” (1968 – The year of reorganizing the Securitate), in *Caietele CNSAS* (Bucharest), No. 1 (2008): esp. 19–22. On the political biographies of Alexandru Drăghici and Ion Stănescu see Dobre et al., eds., *Members of the CC of the RCP*, 231 and, respectively, 545.

⁹⁵ Neculai Constantin Munteanu, *A journalist in the files of the Securitate*, 121.

critical stances towards the regime for many years. In 1968, people in the street could see and feel that something had changed in Romania: the country was opening towards the West; a cautious ideological relaxation was under way together with a slight improvement of the living standard; and the Party was distancing from the Kremlin. All in all, people had a rather positive perception of the regime, which permitted the RCP to achieve a “limited legitimization through consent.”⁹⁶ Also, the year 1968 marked the transition from a process of “selective community-building” to a comprehensive nation-building project aiming at constructing an ethnically homogenous Romanian “socialist” nation. Thus, Romanian national-communism reached full development only in the aftermath of Ceaușescu’s “balcony speech” of 21 August 1968. This was due to the fact that in those days the RCP could claim that it was the continuator of the political traditions of the three historic Romanian principalities and it was perceived as such by large segments of the population. In order to convince the population of its commitment to traditional values, the RCP propaganda machine made full use of the four fundamental historical myths on which modern Romania was created in the second half of the 19th century: ancient roots; continuity; unity; and struggle for independence. At the same time, the year 1968 marked, in fact, the beginning of the end of the period of relative economic liberalization and timid ideological relaxation initiated by Ceaușescu’s predecessor, Gheorghiu-Dej, in 1964. True, Ceaușescu supported the political actions of the CPCz. However, his support for the Prague Spring did not come from his commitment to reform communism. On the contrary, there was nothing in terms of domestic policies which would indicate similarities between RCP’s domestic policies and the reform program of CPCz. Apart from the special emphasis put on independence and non-interference in the internal affairs of a

⁹⁶ As defined by Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 117.

“fraternal” party, there were not many signs of reform communism in the political thought of Ceaușescu. As shown above, from January to August 1968, Ceaușescu constantly referred in his speeches to Stalinist methods of mass mobilization, “systemization” of the national territory and the return to autochthonous values in the sphere of culture. Moreover, the same year 1968, the RCP proceeded to the reorganization of the secret police, the infamous Securitate, which was ordered to put a stronger emphasis on the promotion of officers with higher education and the recruitment of intellectuals as informal collaborators.

The societal response to Ceaușescu’s speech of 21 August 1968 made clear that nationalism was a most powerful political principle, able to confer legitimacy on the RCP rule in Romania. As John Breuilly perceptively points out: “Nationalism is, above and beyond all else, about politics and ... politics is about power. Power, in the modern world, is principally about control of the state.”⁹⁷ Thus, from August 1968 onwards the RCP propaganda machine started to put a much stronger emphasis on ancestors’ struggle for independence and their heroic deeds. In this respect, George Schöpflin has aptly observed: “Mythic and symbolic discourses can ... be employed to assert legitimacy and strengthen authority. They mobilize emotions and enthusiasm. They are a primary means by which people make sense of the political process, which is understood in a symbolic form.”⁹⁸ In Ceaușescu’s Romania, historians co-opted by the propaganda machine devised a “national” history centered on the four fundamental historical myths of the Romanians: (1) ancient roots; (2) continuity on the present day territory; (3) unity; and (4) struggle for independence.

⁹⁷ John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 1.

⁹⁸ George Schöpflin, *Nations, Identity, Power: The New Politics of Europe* (London: Hurst, 2000), 89.

Ancient roots and *continuity* had to do with the ethnic origins of the nation and with the disputes with historians from neighboring Hungary with regard to the contested region of Transylvania, considered as a cradle of their nation by both Romanians and Hungarians. *Unity* and *independence*, however, were intrinsically linked to the RCP policies from 1956 onwards. It was the unity of the Party and its independence from Moscow that permitted the Stalinist elite in Romania to survive de-Stalinization. Therefore, a transfer of such a vision to the Party-State level came almost naturally and was very effective as a propaganda instrument. The medieval rulers of the Romanian principalities had to defend their independence by fighting against the Ottomans; the rulers of communist Romania had to oppose the Soviets in order to preserve the independence of their “socialist” nation-state.

For his part, Ceaușescu wanted to win a place for himself in the heroic tradition of the medieval rulers of the three Romanian Principalities (Wallachia, Moldavia and Transylvania). As already mentioned, from the very beginnings of his rule Ceaușescu manifested his appreciation for the heroic deeds of those medieval rulers and his leadership style was based on a systematic program of domestic visits.⁹⁹ Moreover, it was under Ceaușescu that the myth of Michael the Brave (*Mihai Viteazul*) – the *condottiere* that realized a short-lived unification of the three principalities under his scepter in 1600 – was revived. In 1969, it was started the production of a movie, also entitled *Mihai Viteazul*, directed by Sergiu Nicolaescu. Released in 1971, the movie proved to be the most watched historical Romanian film production of all time, and the third most watched Romanian

⁹⁹ For more on this see Cristina Petrescu, “Vizitele de lucru, un ritual al Epocii de aur” ([Ceaușescu’s] Domestic visits, a ritual of the Golden Epoch), in Lucian Boia, ed., *Miturile comunismului românesc* (Myths of Romanian communism) (Bucharest: Editura Nemira, 1998), 229–38.

movie of all time. In fact, *Mihai Viteazul* epitomized the historical myths of *unity* and *independence*. It is also worth noting that a previous movie by Nicolaescu, *Dacii* (The Dacians), released in 1967, concentrated on *ancient roots* and *continuity*, and alluded to the Roman conquest of the Dacian kingdom and the formation of the Romanian people as a Dacian-Roman synthesis. *Dacii* was Nicolaescu's first success and ranks second after *Mihai Viteazul* in the hierarchy of the most watched Romanian historical movies and fourth in the national rankings of the most watched movies of all time.¹⁰⁰ Nonetheless, the issues of *ancient roots* and *continuity* of the Romanians on the present day territory were addressed in an even more influential feature film released in November 1968. The title of the movie – *Columna* (The Column) – is a direct reference to the famous column, still standing today in Rome, erected by the Roman emperor Trajan (Marcus Ulpius Traianus) to commemorate the two Dacian wars, i.e. 101–102 and 105–106 A.D., which led to the annexation of Dacia to the Roman empire. Directed by Mircea Drăgan and benefiting from an international cast, the movie illustrates the thesis of the birth of the Romanian people as a Roman-Dacian

¹⁰⁰ For details regarding the movies *Dacii* and *Mihai Viteazul*, see Grid Modorcea, ed., *Dicționarul filmului românesc de ficțiune* (Dictionary of the Romanian feature film) (Bucharest: Editura Cartea Românească, 2004), 164–65 and, respectively, 198–99. For a conceptual framework concerning the process of nation-building in communist Romania, see Dragoș Petrescu, “Communist Legacies in the ‘New Europe’: History, Ethnicity, and the Creation of a ‘Socialist’ Nation in Romania, 1945–1989,” in Konrad H. Jarausch and Thomas Lindenberger, eds., *Conflicted Memories: Europeanizing Contemporary Histories* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 37–54. On the rankings devised by the National Centre of Cinematography regarding the most watched Romanian movies of all times see “Cele mai vizionate filme românești din toate timpurile” (The most watched Romanian movies of all time) in *Cotidianul* (Bucharest), 23 August 2005; Internet; http://cotidianul.ro/cele_mai_vizionate_filme_romanesti_din_toate_timpurile-2116.html; accessed 29 July 2008. *Mihai Viteazul* was watched by 13,330,000 persons while *Dacii* was watched by 13,112,000.

synthesis in the aftermath of the second Dacian war. The script also contained some memorable lines that proved to be popular with the younger audiences, such as those of the Dacian nobleman Bastus – played by Gheorghe Dinică, one of the most gifted Romanian actors – who eventually betrays king Decebal.¹⁰¹

Ceaușescu's posture of defiance towards the 1968 Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia misled statesmen, politicians and scholars alike. A keen observer of Romanian politics and society, Jowitt argued at the time that Ceaușescu's stance was characteristic of "romantic (liberal) nationalism:"

Under Ceaușescu, the nationalism of the Romanian regime, at least through the summer of 1969, has been what Carlton Hayes has termed romantic (liberal) nationalism. There are a number of indices one can use to justify this characterization: (a) the presence or absence of a Adam Smith sort of definition of world harmony; (b) an emphasis on the value of sovereignty, that is, national independence; (c) identification with "oppressed" nations; (d) an emphasis on the past which focuses on events and continuity rather than on a golden age or myth era; and (e) a view of nations as the natural divisions of humanity.¹⁰²

In reality, Ceaușescu's vision of national identity had nothing to do with romantic nationalism. He was aiming, as far as the Romanian majority was concerned, at a radical reinforcement of the ethnic ties, a stance made clear by the launch of the so-called "Theses of July 1971." The "theses" was a rather brief document structured on seventeen points, issued on 6 July 1971 and which embodied Ceaușescu's rigid attitude towards education and cultural production. Ceaușescu reiterated the main ideas from the document issued on July 6 at a meeting of the Party active involved in propaganda and

¹⁰¹ For more on the movie *Columna* see Modorcea, ed., *Dictionary of the Romanian feature film*, 181–82.

¹⁰² Jowitt, *Revolutionary Breakthroughs and National Development*, 286.

indoctrination held on 9 July 1971. The “Theses of July 1971” represented a radical attack against the cosmopolitan and the “decadent,” pro-Western attitudes in Romanian culture.¹⁰³ Equally important, they signaled a return to cultural autochthonism. Furthermore, after the launch of the 1971 “theses,” the regime began to place a stronger emphasis on the importance of history writing in building the “socialist” nation, and the most important step to be taken was to provide the party guidelines for the writing of a “national” history.

Three years later, in 1974, it was issued the founding document of Romanian national-communism: the Romanian Communist Party Program (RCP).¹⁰⁴ This official document opened with a 38-page concise history of Romania, which, in fact, became not only the blueprint for a single, compulsory textbook utilized in every school, but also the model for every historical writing published in Romania, based on the four historical myths already discussed: (1) the ancient roots of the Romanian people; (2) the continuity of the Romanians on the present day territory from the ancient times until present; (3) the unity of the Romanian people throughout its history; and (4) the

¹⁰³ Nicolae Ceaușescu, *Propuneri de măsuri pentru îmbunătățirea activității politico-ideologice, de educare marxist-leninistă a membrilor de partid, a tuturor oamenilor muncii – 6 iulie 1971* (Proposals of measures aimed at enhancing the political-ideological activity, of Marxist-Leninist education of the Party members and the entire working people – 6 iulie 1971) and *Expunere la Consfătuirea de lucru a activului de partid din domeniul ideologiei și al activității politice și cultural-educative – 9 iulie 1971* (Exposé at the Meeting of the Party aktiv in the field of ideology and the political and cultural-educational activity – 9 July 1971) (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1971).

¹⁰⁴ See *Programul Partidului Comunist Român de făurire a societății socialiste multilateral dezvoltate și înaintare a României spre comunism* (The Romanian Communist Party’s Program for establishing a multilaterally developed socialist society and Romania’s advancement towards communism) (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1975). Regarding the teleological approach to the “national” history, see pp. 27–64.

Romanians' continuous struggle for independence. Through history and geography teaching the Party propaganda also managed to inculcate in the minds of the young generations the idea that it was continuing the deeds of the ancestors with regard to the preservation of the national identity and territorial integrity. Nationalism is also place-bound. Therefore, as far as geography teaching is concerned, the presence of an identical map of the country, in every classroom of every grammar school in Romania, contributed decisively to the process of "imagining" the nation. In this respect, as Cristina Petrescu has suggested, the generations raised under communism had a different perception of the national territory than the interwar generations. For them, Romanian national territory was imagined as comprising Transylvania, but not including Bessarabia. The mental map they interiorized was based on the political maps they continuously saw in the classrooms and consequently Bessarabia ceased to be perceived, at mass level, as being part of historic Romania's territory. Therefore, during the communist period, the process of imagining the Romanian nation did not include that territory. At the same time, the RCP elite kept alive the idea that Bessarabia was part of historical Romania. As far as Bessarabia is concerned, the process of cultural reproduction created a set of salient values that undermined RCP's ability to manipulate national symbols. Consequently, when Ceaușescu sought to win back popular support by raising the issue of Bessarabia in the late 1980s, he received very little popular backing. The precise moment when the issue of Bessarabia surfaced in the RCP's discourse is still difficult to establish with precision. Niculescu-Mizil argues that discussions with the Soviets were initiated in 1973–74 and were continued in 1978. Nevertheless, at the Fourteenth Congress of the RCP Ceaușescu asked for the abrogation of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ See Niculescu-Mizil, *From Comintern to national-communism*, 448–49.

After the launch of the 1974 Romanian Communist Party's Program, the regime devised a national festival, *Cîntarea României* (Song of Praise to Romania), which was initiated in 1976 and took place annually until 1989. A national sport competition – *Daciada* – whose name was a clear reference to the Dacian origins of the Romanians was also launched. *Daciada*, however, was less influential in legitimizing the RCP rule as compared with *Cîntarea României*.¹⁰⁶ The national festival *Cîntarea României* played an important role in forging allegiance to the Party and its supreme leader because it was devised as a sort of huge cultural-ideological umbrella for the totality of cultural activities that took place in Romania after 1976. In other words, everything that could be identified as a cultural event had to be part of the national festival and praise, one way or another, the nation, as well as the Party and its *conducător* (leader). Furthermore, the festival gathered not only professional artists, but also large numbers of amateur artists from all over the country. For the amateur artists the festival was first and foremost an opportunity to escape from their boring workplaces and spend some days out of factory and sometimes out of town.¹⁰⁷ The price to be paid was that they had to praise *Partidul*, *Ceaușescu*, *România*, but many felt that it was worth doing it. Insidiously, however, through the verses that people recited and the songs they sang a set of political values and attitudes were slowly inculcated. The result was that many acquired a subjective version of national history and came to believe that Party's

¹⁰⁶ On the first edition (1976/1977) of the national festival *Cîntarea României* see Dragoș Petrescu, "Cîntarea României sau stalinismul național în festival" (Song of Praise to Romania or the national-Stalinism in festival), in Lucian Boia, ed., *Miturile comunismului românesc* (Myths of Romanian communism) (Bucharest: Editura Nemira, 1998), 239–51. For more on the national sport competition *Daciada* see Vlad Georgescu, *Politics and history*, 124–25.

¹⁰⁷ Such an assertion is also supported by what the present author has observed directly, while working as an engineer at the Romlux Tîrgoviște Electric Bulbs Factory during the period 1987–1989.

achievements were indeed a continuation of the heroic deeds of the medieval rulers. Let us not forget that the magic of the 1968 “balcony speech” was still powerful. Also, one should bear in mind that it was only after 1981 that the economic crisis began to undermine regime’s efforts of indoctrinating the population.

Such a mixture of professionalism and amateurishness harmed not only the quality of the cultural products, but also made more space for those products that served best the communist propaganda machine. Initially, in terms of glorification of the RCP and its supreme leader, amateur artists overdid the compliments, as a way of achieving official recognition. Soon afterwards, professional artists saw in the festival a means for upward mobility and a possibility to earn easy money and followed suit. Consequently, many professional artists produced continuously, until the demise of the regime, artworks of pretentious bad taste depicting the supreme leader and his wife. The eighties, especially, proved to be a fertile period for the production of this kind of kitsch.¹⁰⁸ What is important, however, for the present analysis is that at grassroots level the festival was

¹⁰⁸ One can mention painters such as Constantin Piliuță and Sabin Bălașa, or poets such as Corneliu Vadim Tudor and Adrian Păunescu. The list of those professional artists (to say nothing of the large numbers of amateur artists) who produced such kind of “artworks” is, however, much longer. See for instance the numerous paintings dedicated to the Ceaușescu couple, by both professional and amateur artists, reproduced in the *Luceafărul Almanac 1988* (Bucharest), 1–13, and the *Scînteia Almanac 1987* (Bucharest), 25–31. For figures concerning the artistic production, see Nicolae Stoian, “Cîntarea României – Un festival-epopee” (Song of Praise to Romania: A festival-epopee), in *Flacăra Almanac 1978* (Bucharest), 32–36 and N. Popescu-Bogdănești, “Cîntarea României: O constelație a talentelor poporului” (Song of Praise to Romania: A constellation of people’s talents), in *Scînteia Almanac 1978* (Bucharest), 129–36. As for poetry, a good introduction to the productions by court poets is Eugen Negrici, *Poezia unei religii politice: Patru decenii de agitație și propagandă* (The poetry of a political religion: Four decades of agitation and propaganda) (Bucharest: Editura Pro, n.d.), esp. 311–49.

instrumental in praising Romanianness and the unity of the Party-State. Thus, through cultural reproduction, the regime succeeded in enforcing upon the ethnic Romanians a stronger sense of belonging to the organized solidarity of the Romanian nation.

In addition to the *Cîntarea României* national festival, another huge propaganda machine under the guise of a traveling cultural show served with rather simple means the identity politics enforced by the regime: the *Flacăra* (Flame) Cenacle of Revolutionary Youth led by poet Adrian Păunescu. From 1973 until its demise in June 1985, the *Flacăra Cenacle* succeeded in confiscating the natural rebelliousness of the young generation and in transforming or directing it towards patriotic stances and thus towards allegiance to the Party-State. The long-term effects of the nationalistic cultural products propagated by the *Flacăra* traveling cenacle were disastrous: by channeling the energy of a generation who did not yet perceive the system as utterly bad, the *Flacăra Cenacle* hampered the development of a counterculture and thus contributed significantly in hampering the structuring of dissidence in Romania. By mixing rock music with poetry praising the nation, the Party and its supreme leader, Păunescu's cenacle reached a public that *Cîntarea României* could not reach: the young and potentially rebellious people. The message of the *Flacăra Cenacle* was that communism and a sort of alternative culture could coexist. Young people were allowed to stay until small hours on stadiums throughout the country where they could sing, dance, smoke, consume some alcohol, and make love. In many respects, the atmosphere on the stadiums where the *Flacăra Cenacle* performed was more pleasant than what the system could offer in terms of leisure opportunities, especially in the early 1980s. On 15 June 1985, however, the *Flacăra Cenacle* performed on a stadium in the city of Ploiești, some 50 km. north of Bucharest, when a torrential rain caused a melee. Five people died and many were injured. As a consequence, the regime banned the *Flacăra Cenacle*.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ On the Ploiești event see Dinu C. Giurescu, *Romania's history in data*, 719.

Nevertheless, the harm was done. Politicized rock did not appear in Romania and this was also due to the Păunescu's cenacle. True, the rock-and-roll counterculture was also undermined by the economic crisis and the rationing of power consumption, as a Westerner ironically observed: "How could you expect rock-and-roll to survive in a country where there is barely enough electricity to power a light bulb, let alone drive an electric guitar?"¹¹⁰ However, the role of the *Flacăra Cenacle* in "confiscating" a major segment of the alternative culture to which *Cîntarea României* was not able to get and channeling it into patriotic performances in accordance with the tenets of Ceaușescu's July 1971 Theses must not be neglected.¹¹¹

At the power elite level, the rule of Ceaușescu consolidated rapidly in the aftermath of the Tenth Congress of the RCP, held on 6–12 August 1969. In fact, Ceaușescu was not challenged from within the RCP during the next decade, i.e. 1969–1979. It is also true that he did not have to use terror anymore to rule; instead, he made use of the "rotation of cadres" and relied increasingly on relatives.¹¹² One can have a pretty accurate image of the scale of the process of "rotation of cadres" by consulting the lists of the officials who entered the Romanian governments from 1975 onwards and looking to the successive positions they occupied until the fall of the regime. From the mid-1970s to the end of the communist rule in Romania there were four governments in power, as follows: (1) the Manea Mănescu government (18 March 1975 – 28 March 1980); (2) the Ilie Verdet government (29 March 1980 – 20 May 1982); (3) the first Constantin Dăscălescu government (21 May 1982 – 28 March

¹¹⁰ Quoted in Sabrina P. Ramet, *Social Currents in Eastern Europe: The Sources and Meaning of the Great Transformation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 234.

¹¹¹ Actually, the *Flacăra Cenacle* won the first prize for "artistic and cultural-educative activity" at the inaugural (1976–1977) edition of the national festival *Cîntarea României*.

¹¹² See the lists of ministers in Neagoe, *A history of Romania's governments, 1859–1995*, 205–43.

1985); and (4) the second Constantin Dăscălescu government (29 March 1985 – 22 December 1989).

In 1979, however, a Party veteran dared to raise his voice against Ceaușescu. In front of the Twelfth Party Congress held on 19–23 November 1979, Constantin Pârvulescu, an old-timer, protested resolutely against the rule of Ceaușescu and the personality cult developed around him. An 84 years old Party veteran and one of the founders of the RCP, Pârvulescu affirmed in the front of the RCP Congress that nothing serious was discussed by the delegates to the event, who shouted incessantly the slogan “Ceaușescu reales la al doisprezecelea Congres” (Ceaușescu re-elected at the Twelfth Congress). Therefore, Pârvulescu further stated, he would vote against the re-election of Nicolae Ceaușescu as Secretary General of the RCP. Pârvulescu did not receive any support from the nomenklatura members or other officials in the audience and was evacuated immediately from the Congress hall.¹¹³ No other Party official dared to criticize the rule of Ceaușescu in a similar manner until the late 1980s. However, an unexpected change took place in Moscow and which would change fundamentally the relations between the “Moscow center” and the Sovietized countries in ECE: the coming to power of Mikhail Gorbachev.

Disenchantment and de-legitimation, 1985–1989

When a Romanian high rank party official exclaimed in a discussion with a foreign diplomat: “Independence is our legitimacy!” he really meant it.¹¹⁴ In the particular case of Romania, the nationalistic hatred

¹¹³ For a brief account of the event see Dinu C. Giurescu, ed., *Romania's history in data*, 675.

¹¹⁴ Quoted in Mihai Botez, *Românii despre ei înșiși* (Romanians about themselves) (Bucharest: Editura Litera, 1992), 33.

for the Soviets acted in favor of the regime until the mid-1980s. At mass level, one of the lessons taught by the national history was that nothing good came from the East and the regime was prepared to nurture and exploit Romanians' Russophobia, which, as Hugh Seton-Watson put it, "is second only to that of Poles."¹¹⁵ This it did skillfully until mid-1980s.

It was, however, something that the regime could not foresee, i.e. the coming to power in Moscow of a younger leader with a broader vision of politics and a different leadership style. After 1985, in the conditions of the structural economic and moral crisis of Romanian communism, the launch of Gorbachev's domestic *perestroika* led to the emergence of a totally different image of Soviet Union and its leadership. "Gorbimania" started to spread among Romania's population, which was exasperated by the economic crisis and personality cult of the "Genius of the Carpathians." When Gorbachev paid an official visit to Romania, between 25 and 27 of May 1987, many Romanians hoped, in vain, that he would persuade Ceaușescu to introduce some economic reforms. All in all, the combined result of the economic and moral crisis of the Ceaușescu regime and the program of reforms introduced by the new leadership in Moscow was that the Romanians ceased to perceive the Soviet Union as a real threat to Romania's sovereignty. On the contrary, large segments of the population in Romania began to look towards Moscow in the hope of setting them free from the domestic tyranny of the Ceaușescu clan. People were eager to find more about Gorbachev's reforms. Pamphlets and brochures published in Romanian in the Soviet Union by the Novosti Press Agency circulated, especially in Bucharest, as a sort of dissident writings. During the 1988–1989 period people read avidly Soviet brochures whose titles contained subversive words and

¹¹⁵ Cited in Wayne S. Vucinich, "Major Trends in Eastern Europe," in Stephen Fischer-Galati, ed., *Eastern Europe in the 1980s* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1981), 9.

syntagms such as: “restructuring,” “renewal,” “innovative,” and “a new vision.”¹¹⁶ In terms of nationalist propaganda, therefore, the key argument of RCP’s legitimating discourse, i.e. independence from Moscow, vanished after the inception of Gorbachev’s reforms. Thus, the period 1985–1989 can be defined as one of disenchantment with, and de-legitimation of, the RCP rule in Romania.

Following Pârvulescu’s open criticism of Ceaușescu in 1979, another critical voice from within the party elite was heard only in 1987. In the aftermath of the Brașov workers’ uprising of 15 November 1987, Silviu Brucan – a veteran communist militant that occupied top positions under the rule of Gheorghiu-Dej as deputy editor of the Party daily newspaper *Scînteia* between 1944 and 1956, and ambassador to the United States (1956–59) and the United Nations (1959–62) – decided to speak out. On 29 November 1987, Brucan issued a statement in which he stated that “a period of crisis has opened up in relations between the Romanian Communist Party and the workers.”¹¹⁷ Nevertheless, the most notable protest within the establishment occurred on 14 March

¹¹⁶ See for instance: *Conferința a XIX-a a P.C.U.S.: O nouă viziune, hotărîri cu caracter novator* (The 19th conference of the CPSU: A new vision, innovative decisions) (Moscow: Novosti Press Agency, 1988); *Cea de-a XIX-a conferință a P.C.U.S.: Documente și materiale—Raportul prezentat de Mihail Gorbaciiov, secretar general al C.C. al P.C.U.S.* (The 19th conference of the CPSU: Documents and materials – The report presented by Mikhail Gorbachev, general secretary of the CPSU) (Moscow: Novosti Press Agency, 1988); *Congresul deputaților poporului din U.R.S.S.: Raportul prezentat de Mihail Gorbaciiov, Moscova, Kremlin, 30 mai 1989* (People’s Deputies Congress: The report presented by Mikhail Gorbachev, Moscow, Kremlin, 30 May 1989) (Moscow: Novosti Press Agency, 1989); Nikolai Șmeliov, *Restructurarea așa cum o vede un economist* (Restructuring as seen by an economist) (Moscow: Novosti Press Agency, 1989); and *Restructurarea: Probleme, Studii, Prognoze – Potențialul spiritual al înnoirii* (Restructuring: Problems, Studies, Prognoses – The spiritual potential of renewal) (Moscow: Novosti Press Agency, 1989).

¹¹⁷ Dennis Deletant, *Ceaușescu and the Securitate: Coercion and Dissent in Romania, 1965–1989* (London: Hurst & Company, 1995), 253.

1989, when the open letter signed by six former high-rank officials of the party – Gheorghe Apostol, Alexandru Bârlădeanu, Silviu Brucan, Corneliu Mănescu, Constantin Pârvulescu and Grigore Răceanu – was broadcast by Radio Free Europe. The letter was addressed to Ceaușescu and began with an indictment of his mistaken policies. The six former high rank Party officials concluded their letter with three demands addressed directly to Ceaușescu: (1) to declare in categorical and unequivocal terms that he has renounced to the plan of rural systematization; (2) to reestablish the constitutional guarantees concerning the citizens' rights, which would indicate that Romania has adhered to the decisions of the Vienna Conference concerning human rights; and (3) to stop the export of foodstuffs which—the signatories considered—was threatening the very biological existence of the nation.¹¹⁸ The “letter of the six” terminated with the following phrase: “Immediately after these measures will be taken we are ready to participate, in a constructive manner, in a dialogue with the government on the ways and means to resolve the current crisis.”¹¹⁹

It must be emphasized that all the signatories of the letter had been part of Gheorghiu-Dej's team and some of them, at different levels, had been part of the confident Romanian communist elite that emancipated itself from Moscow in the late 1950s. It may be argued that being a part of the elite that learned high politics by doing it and emerged as a skilled group of political actors within the communist bloc the signatories had a broader view of world politics than Ceaușescu's men. It was for the first time in communist Romania that former top Party officials were publicly criticizing Ceaușescu's policies. Among the signatories were Brucan and

¹¹⁸ For the complete text of the “letter of the six,” see Silviu Brucan, *Generația irosită: Memorii* (The wasted generation: Memoirs) (Bucharest: Editurile Univers & Calistrat Hogaș, 1992), 190–94.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 194.

Pârvulescu, who had already criticized the Ceaușescu regime. The others were communist personalities such as Alexandru Bârlădeanu and Corneliu Mănescu, who proved themselves in international politics during the 1960s and 1970s, as well as Gheorghe Apostol, who had been Gheorghiu-Dej's oldest collaborator.¹²⁰ Less known was Grigore Răceanu, an old-timer purged by Gheorghiu-Dej in 1958.¹²¹ The "letter of the six" marked a watershed in the history of the RCP. On the one hand, the letter of the six represented the first major split at the level of the RCP elite. For the first time since the 1957 split at the top – the Constantinescu-Chișinevski episode, the monolithism of the RCP was broken and a major faction of the nomenklatura openly protested against Ceaușescu's lead. On the other hand, the signatories of the letter were already retired when RFE broadcast the text and their links with the Party were practically severed. In this respect, the letter came too late and therefore had an insignificant impact on RCP's domestic policies. In other words, the "mortal sin" of factionalism was committed too late to avoid a bloody revolution in 1989.

In what concerns the legitimating power of nationalism, the regime was left with a sole target: the Hungarian minority in Romania. Thus, on 20 December 1989 Ceaușescu affirmed that the revolt in Timișoara, which sparked the Romanian revolution, was the result of the activity of "hooligan elements, working together with reactionary, imperialistic, irredentist, chauvinistic circles ... aiming at the territorial dismemberment of

¹²⁰ In 1948, Apostol was already a member of the Politburo.

¹²¹ Fortunately, three of the signatories, Brucan, Bârlădeanu, and Mănescu have provided their own accounts on the preparation of the "letter of the six." See Brucan, *Memoirs*, 194–208; Betea, *Bârlădeanu on Dej, Ceaușescu, and Iliescu*, 216–25; and Betea, *Mănescu: Unfinished conversations*, 247–53. Also, Răceanu's step son, Mircea Răceanu, has provided some useful details and comments. See Mircea Răceanu, *Infern '89: Povestea unui condamnat la moarte* (Inferno 1989: The story of a prisoner sentenced to death) (Bucharest: Editura Silex, 2000), 137–54.

Romania.”¹²² To be sure, Ceaușescu was hinting, among others, at neighboring Hungary and the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, the new image of the Soviet Union among Romania’s population deeply undermined the propagandistic efforts of the regime. In the late 1980s, independence from Moscow ceased to be a major source of legitimacy for the communist regime in Romania. By 1989, the Romanian polity was definitely split into *us* and *them*.

As for *them* – the inner circle of power around the Ceaușescu couple – they displayed a high level of cohesion, the highest among the six countries that compose the 1989 sequence of collapse, up to the very end of the regime. This explains in many respects why Romania occupies the last position, the sixth, in the said sequence. At the same time, to paraphrase the statement of the Romanian top communist official quoted in the beginning of this section, *independence* ceased to be *their* legitimacy and this permitted popular protest to grow and spread across Romania in December 1989. It was due to the fact that the RCP discourse centered on *independence* from Moscow lost its legitimating power in the eyes of a majority of the population that Romania was eventually able to exit from communism in 1989.

¹²² See the text of Ceaușescu’s televised evening discourse of 20 December 1989 in Aurel Perva and Carol Roman, *Misterele revoluției române: Revenire după ani* (The mysteries of the Romanian revolution: A come back after years) (Bucharest: Editura Carro, 1991), 38–39.

The political cultures of resistance

A comprehensive analysis of the political cultures of resistance would imply a study of the rather numerous subcultures that characterize a modern society. This, however, would go much beyond the scope of this book. Nevertheless, in order to examine the major aspects related to the appearance and development of dissident actions in communist Romania, this section focuses on the political cultures of resistance at the elite and respectively mass level. As Jowitt suggests, the concept of “dissimulation” understood as the posture, response, and strategy which integrates the public and private spheres is useful for explaining political attitudes and behavior at the community level under communist rule. “Dissimulation,” the same author further argues, “takes the form, not so much of political opposition, as of a strong anti-political privatism in which family and personal interests are emphasized at the expense of regime and societal interests.”¹²³ Applied to a society modernized from above through “cognitive dissonance” such as the Romanian one, the concept of “anti-political privatism” is particularly useful when analyzing the lack of dissident networks under communist rule. Moreover, during the 1980s, in the conditions of the deep economic crisis communist Romania experienced a consolidation of the extended family pattern accompanied by the development of a complicated network of mutual services which led, as a side-effect, to an increasing “egoism of small groups.”¹²⁴ However, in December 1989 the growing “egoism of small groups” was unexpectedly subverted and a short-lived moment of solidarity occurred, creating a frail cross-class alliance that brought down the

¹²³ Jowitt, *The Leninist Extinction*, 80.

¹²⁴ For an analysis of the Polish case see Michal Buchowski, “The shifting meanings of civil and civic society in Poland,” in Chris Hann and Elizabeth Dunn, eds., *Civil Society: Challenging Western Models* (London: Routledge, 1996), 85.

communist regime. As a side effect, due to its frailty the said cross-class alliance was not able to offer a viable political alternative to the second- and third-rank nomenklatura members that filled the power vacuum after the fall of Ceaușescu. The following section aims at answering some simple, but nevertheless relevant, questions such as: What shaped the political cultures of resistance in communist Romania? What kept alive the spirit of opposition throughout the 1980s? or What made a majority of the population feel solidary in their protest against the regime of Nicolae Ceaușescu in December 1989?

Intellectuals and the syndrome of “velvet” dissent

Applied to the Romanian intellectual elite, the above-mentioned concept of “egoism of small groups” apparently explains the paralysis of the civil society in communist Romania. Some authors argued that the failure of the Goma movement for human rights epitomizes the entire story of Romanian dissent. Speaking about the Romanian dissidence in the 1970s, a Western specialist in East European affairs affirmed in the early 1980s that: “Romanian dissent lives in Paris and his name is Paul Goma.”¹²⁵ This seems to be true since after Goma the other radical dissidents of the 1980s, such as Doina Cornea, Dorin Tudoran, Radu Filipescu, Gabriel Andreescu or Dan Petrescu, experienced a similar loneliness of radical dissidence.

Therefore, the general perception was that, compared with the Central European Czechoslovakia, Hungary or Poland, Romania did not behave under communist rule as an “occident kidnappé,” to use Milan Kundera’s inspired syntagm. Kundera’s essay “Un occident kidnappé – où la tragédie de l’Europe centrale” sparked the most important debate on the fate of the “rebellious,” anticommunist

¹²⁵ Michael Shafir, *Romania. Politics, Economics and Society: Political Stagnation and Simulated Change* (London: Frances Pinter Publishers, 1985), 168.

Central Europe which took place in the early 1980s. For Kundera, Central Europe was “the Eastern border of the West,” a family of small nations that had its own vision of the world and “by virtue of its cultural history” was “the West.” Kundera’s Central Europe comprised those nations that behaved as an “occident kidnappé” by the Soviet Union: the Hungarians, the Poles and the Czechs. In his view, the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, the 1968 Prague Spring, and the birth of Polish Solidarity in 1980 proved that a difference existed between the countries of Central Europe, i.e. Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, and those of Eastern Europe i.e. Bulgaria and Romania. Nevertheless, what Kundera’s approach cannot explain is why communist regimes in both “rebellious” Central Europe (former Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland) and the “submissive” Southeast Europe (Bulgaria and Romania) collapsed the same year 1989.¹²⁶ In other words, it is a fact that communism collapsed during the same “miraculous year” 1989 in all countries mentioned above. Nevertheless, a difference between the “rebellious” and the “submissive” nations resides in the pace of the democratic transformation that followed the 1989 revolutions. Thus, a higher degree of rebelliousness under communism made the difference between the countries in ECE that experienced a more rapid transition to democracy, i.e. Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, and those where the process was more tortuous and painful, i.e. Bulgaria and Romania.

Thus, as far as Romania is concerned one should explain not only why opposition to the regime was so weak among the intellectual elites in that country, but also what role the few radical dissidents

¹²⁶ Milan Kundera, “Un occident kidnappé – ou la tragédie de l’Europe centrale,” *Le Débat* (November 1983), 3–22. The version cited in the present article was published under the title “The Tragedy of Central Europe,” in Gale Stokes, ed., *From Stalinism to Pluralism: A Documentary History of Eastern Europe Since 1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 217–23.

actually played in the revolution of December 1989. To be sure, the answer to such a question is by no means simple. The argument put forward by this chapter is that although dissidence developed only tortuously in communist Romania and took a more articulate form only in the late 1980s, dissidents and critical intellectuals played a major role in transforming the anti-Ceaușescu character of the revolt into an anticommunist revolution. In other words, there were mainly the radical dissidents and critical intellectuals that turned the expressing actions of a majority of the population, i.e. the anti-Ceaușescu protests, into purposive actions, i.e. a fundamental regime change.

Until writer Paul Goma launched, in 1977, the movement for human rights that now bears his name, dissidence was almost non-existent in communist Romania. There were two main reasons for such a situation. First, it was about the relative success of the overall political strategy devised by the Gheorghiu-Dej regime after 1956, which was based on two pivotal issues, i.e. industrialization and independence. Ceaușescu only adapted the strategy of his predecessor to the post-1968 context and thus focused on “socialist” modernization and nation-building. As Cristina Petrescu has suggested, especially after August 1968, this stance made of Ceaușescu himself a most prominent “dissident.”¹²⁷ Also, such a strategy proved to be particularly successful because it was consistent with the strategy of economic and political development adopted by the successive governments and regimes since the inception of the modern Romanian state (1859), and appealed not only to a majority of Romania’s intelligentsia, but also to a majority of the population. Second, the regime had something consistent to offer to cultural, as well as technical, intelligentsia. After the period of Stalinist terror of the 1950s, the “tacit deal” offered by the regime led to the co-optation

¹²⁷ See Cristina Petrescu, “Ar mai fi ceva de spus: Despre disidența din România lui Ceaușescu” (There is something more to say: On dissidence in Ceaușescu’s Romania), afterword to Petrescu and Cangeopol, 319.

of the intellectual elites that benefited widely from the period of relative ideological relaxation. It was only after 1980 that the “new social contract” became more and more restricted, in the sense that the regime was increasingly selective in allowing individuals and groups enter the “tacit deal.” During the 1980s, the “tacit deal” was not anymore open to all those willing to abide by the rules because the regime did not need to co-opt the elites anymore. Furthermore, during the 1980s, in the conditions of the economic crisis described above, the resources became increasingly scarce and the regime was less and less able to reward properly the rapidly increasing numbers of sycophants. At the same time, the regime was able to instrumentalize nationalism from August 1968 onwards, which allowed the creation of a relatively enduring focus of identification with the regime and hampered to some extent the development of intellectual dissidence in communist Romania.

It was also an earthly argument that nurtured opposition and dissent. Towards the mid-1980s, many intellectuals started to realize that, after all, they had something in common with ordinary people: they also had to feed regularly their families. This, however, did not apply to prominent public figures. To them, the regime had until its very end something very precious to offer: the permission to travel abroad, especially to the West. At the same time, from 1977 onwards, nobody could pretend that nothing happened in Romania in terms of opposition towards the regime. Goma offered a chance to all those willing to protest against the rule of Ceaușescu if they wanted to do so.

Having said this, let us discuss briefly the significance of the Goma movement. The movement for human rights initiated by writer Paul Goma was the Romanian response to the Czechoslovak Charter 77 and was inaugurated in January 1977 by a letter of solidarity sent by Goma to Pavel Kohout, one of the leaders of the Charter 77. In addition, Goma wrote an appeal to the 1977 Belgrade conference, i.e. the Helsinki follow-up conference, demanding that the Ceaușescu regime comply with the provisions of the 1975 Helsinki conference

concerning the observance of human rights by the signatory governments. What followed explains to some extent Goma's frustration and his post-1989 sharp criticism towards the Romanian cultural establishment. Apart from writer Ion Negoïtescu and psychiatrist Ion Vianu, no other prominent intellectuals supported Goma's actions. Moreover, among the approximately 200 persons who eventually signed the appeal, the overwhelming majority actually wanted just to obtain a passport – the so-called “Goma passport” – in order to emigrate to the West. The authorities, after trying in vain to persuade Goma to renounce to his radical stance, imprisoned him on 1 April 1977. After the news of his arrest reached the West, an international campaign, in which the Romanian desk of RFE played a major role, was immediately launched. As a result of the sustained international campaign, the communist authorities released Goma from prison on 6 May 1977. Embittered by the lack of support from the part of his fellow writers, marginalized and frustrated, in November 1977 Goma left Romania definitively together with his wife and son, and settled in Paris.¹²⁸

Nevertheless, one should bear in mind that at the moment when the Goma movement was launched the overwhelming majority of the population thought that the communist rule in Romania, as well as in the rest of the Sovietized ECE, was unlikely to be challenged in the foreseeable future. The rise and fall of the Goma movement showed that: (1) it was possible to initiate an opposition movement in Romania; (2) the Romanian desk of RFE was ready to act swiftly and efficiently to spread the news and provide some protection to the protesters by making their names known to international

¹²⁸ Goma wrote at length about his dissidence and the subsequent anticommunist activity in Paris. For a detailed account of the unfolding of events during the January-April 1977 period see Paul Goma, *Culoarea curcubeului '77: Cutremurul oamenilor* (The colour of the rainbow '77: The earthquake of the people) (Oradea: Editura Multiprint, 1993).

organizations, such as Amnesty International; and (3) that the elites, cultural and technical alike, were not prone to join the protest; those who nevertheless joined the movement, wanted in general to obtain a passport and leave the country.

In connection to the Goma movement and its strictly limited echo among fellow intellectuals, there is an issue that deserves a closer look: the problem of the so-called “resistance through culture.” The main argument that stays behind the concept of “resistance through culture” was quite simple. As a majority of the Romanian intellectuals have claimed, before *and* after the 1989 revolution, the Ceaușescu rule in Romania was so harsh, and the secret police, the infamous Securitate, was so powerful, that any attempt at intellectual dissidence was doomed to failure in the shortest time. Instead, the proponents of the “resistance through culture” argue, the most efficient way to resist the regime was to concentrate on cultural production. As a consequence, from the early 1970s onwards the most important intellectual debates were concerned with the latent conflict between the so-called “protochronists” and the “europeanizers” or “modernists.” The debate, however, was primarily concerned with the problem of literary values. “Europeanizers” argued in favor of the cultural values of the West, which was to some extent a bold stance after the launch of Ceaușescu’s “theses” of 6 July 1971, as models for improving native literary works. For their part, the protochronists argued, as the literary historian and aesthetician Edgar Papu put it, that a “number of Romanian literary developments chronologically precede similar achievements in other countries.”¹²⁹ A majority of

¹²⁹ For more on Edgar Papu, seen as the founder of Romanian protochronism, see Anneli Ute Gabanyi, “Romanian ‘Protochronism’ and the New Cultural Order,” in idem, *The Ceaușescu Cult* (Bucharest: The Romanian Cultural Foundation Publishing House, 2000), 156. For a recent overall assessment of the phenomenon, see Alexandra Tomiță, *O istorie “glorioasă”: Dosarul protocronismului românesc* (A “glorious” history: The dossier of Romanian protochronism) (Bucharest: Editura Cartea Românească, 2007).

the protochronists thus advocated the recognition of Romanian contributions to world culture. In many respects, as Verdery has perceptively argued, protochronism “was an intensified resuscitation of interwar indigenist arguments about national essence.”¹³⁰

In spite of the support provided by the Romanian desk of RFE, which, as already discussed, was ready to spread immediately the dissident message, the “europeanizers” did not act as a dissident group: for instance, they did not criticize publicly the cultural policy enforced by the regime after July 1971. In a majority of the cases, the debate was carried out within the limits imposed from above by the communist regime. As Verdery puts it, those who opposed protochronism expended “their energies in a joint defense of intellectual authority rather than in a more substantial critique of power.”¹³¹ Sadly enough, “resistance through culture” proved to be a strategy that offered the communist regime the opportunity to co-opt gifted intellectuals by offering them the illusion of living a normal professional life and, of course, by giving them the opportunity to travel to the West. Instead of epitomizing a form of “everyday resistance,” “resistance through culture” proved to be ultimately a form of “everyday co-optation.”¹³² To those who were not asked to

¹³⁰ Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceausescu's Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 168, 179. A brief survey of the debate on “protochronism” is provided in Gabanyi, *The Ceausescu Cult*, 155–62.

¹³¹ Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism*, 169.

¹³² The relevance of the cultural production of the “resisters through culture” is yet to be assessed. Twenty years after the fall of the communist regime the literary canon is about to suffer further modifications due to a revived tendency to concentrate more on the literary value rather than on the ethical, or even dissident, value of a given work. In a recent analysis on the topic, literary critic Paul Cernat wrote: “The post-1989 East-ethical revisionism ... has been responsible for the persistent protracting of a deliberate confusion between ethical, aesthetic and political, which has led not only to a vitiation of numerous value judgements, but also to a malicious parochialization of our cultural field.” See Paul Cernat, “Iluziile

collaborate with, or still had scruples in serving, the regime, “resistance through culture” offered a minimal mental comfort in a period when hardships and widespread malaise disrupted normalcy. Their stance, however, did not annoy the regime. Furthermore, as dissident writer Dorin Tudoran put it, one cannot “defend and preserve culture only by culture.”¹³³ One should also fight for a cause, and up to the spring of 1989 there were not many literati willing to do so. This also explains why the “drawer literature” proved to be so scarce after the fall of the regime.

With regard to the drawer literature, there were nevertheless some notable exceptions. One of them is a novel finished in 1985, authored by Ion D. Sîrbu and entitled *Adio Europa!* (Farewell, Europe!). The novel – which was published only in 1993, i.e. after the breakdown of the communist regime – captures perfectly the atmosphere of the 1980s, characteristic of the economic and moral ruin of the Ceaușescu regime. The main character of the novel is an intellectual who wanted to live in the civilized West, but has no other choice than to live on the other side of the Iron Curtain, in Isarlîk, an imaginary town in southern Romania. Here, the similarity between Sîrbu’s biography and that of his character is obvious. Raised and educated in the main cultural center of Transylvania, the city of Cluj, Sîrbu was forced because of his political biography to settle in the Oltenian city of Craiova. Even more interesting is the way in which the author depicts some major aspects of everyday life in Romania during the 1980s. Thus, Sîrbu’s book is about corruption and cowardliness, nepotism and bribery, false patriotism and duplicity, urban decay and nostalgia

revizionismului est-etic” (The illusions of the East-ethical revisionism), *Observator Cultural* (Bucharest) Nos.: 539 (Part I); 540 (Part II); and 541 (Part III), August-September 2010; the passage quoted has been published in Part III, Nr. 541 (2010). For more on “canonization” and cultural memory see Aleida Assmann, “Canon and Archive,” in Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, eds., *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), 99–100.

¹³³ Freedom House, *Romania: A Case of “Dynastic” Communism*, 75.

for the bygone days of normality. In other words, it is about everyday life in late-communist Romania. The masterful depiction of Ceaușescu's Romania as an "Ottomanized" Balkan country gives one the feeling that Isarlík could have been any town in communist Romania. Isarlík, in fact, is the epitome of urban Romania in the 1980s.¹³⁴

Turning back to the political cultures of resistance, one should stress that a cross-class alliance did not emerge in Romania until December 1989, when the overwhelming majority of the population became united in its protest against the Ceaușescu regime. It is another question as to why a cross-class alliance on the Polish Solidarity model did not emerge in communist Romania until December 1989. In fact, until the 1987 Brașov revolt working-class protests did not receive support from the part of either critical or technical intelligentsia. A good opportunity to link intellectual dissidence with working-class unrest was lost in 1977. Unfortunately, there was no connection between the two major protests that occurred in 1977, i.e. the dissident movement led by the writer Paul Goma (January-April) and the strike organized by miners in the Jiu Valley basin (August). To some extent, the specifics of teaching of industrial arts and applied sciences might explain the more conformist mindset of the technical intelligentsia in Romania. In this respect, the number of radical dissident stances among the technical intelligentsia was smaller as compared to the number of similar stances among the cultural intelligentsia. With regard to the creation of a "caste" of specialists quite faithful to the communist regime that created it, Zygmunt Bauman observed:

In most countries, practically all modern specialization came into being during the period of communist rule and the specialists have no

¹³⁴ See Ion D. Sîrbu, *Adio, Europa!* (Farewell, Europe!) 2 vols. (Bucharest: Editura Cartea Românească, 1993).

collective, institutionalized memory of professional life under any other conditions. What follows is that everywhere a considerable part of the educated elite has been made to the measure of the communist regime from the beginning. Coping with the situation defined by the communist bureaucracy has been an integral part of their occupational training and professional upbringing.¹³⁵

There is some truth in such an assertion. Arguably, the fact that the communist regime put a strong emphasis on undergraduate training in engineering hampered the development of a critical mass of “rebellious” intellectuals able to think in political terms. In communist Romania, the number of students in industrial arts and applied sciences grew steadily. For instance, the available data for the academic year 1980/81 show that the graduates from polytechnic universities made up 58.5 percent of the total.¹³⁶ Moreover, among the most prominent radical dissidents in Romania only Radu Filipescu was an engineer. It was also due to the latent hostility between the intellectuals and the working class that cross-class alliance could not be established in Ceaușescu’s Romania. For instance, Istvan Hosszu, a Jiu Valley miner who participated to the August 1977 strike, observed in 1989: “My discussions, as a worker in Romania, with the Romanian intelligentsia were very unpleasant.... The intelligentsia in Romania, unfortunately, misunderstands, in fact disdains the working class and, in a way, brutalizes it.”¹³⁷ There was, however, a daring attempt at creating a free trade union in Romania as early as 1979, that is, before the creation of the Polish Solidarity. The Free Trade Union of the Working People in Romania (*Sindicatul Liber al Oamenilor Muncii din România* – SLOMR) existed practically from January to June 1979. Its leaders – Ionel Cană, Gheorghe

¹³⁵ Zygmunt Bauman, “Intellectuals in East-Central Europe: Continuity and Change,” in *Eastern European Politics and Societies*, 1–2 (1987), 181.

¹³⁶ See Table 17 in Shafir, *Romania: Politics, Economics and Society*, 145.

¹³⁷ Freedom House, *Romania: A Case of “Dynastic” Communism*, 86–87.

Braşoveanu and Nicolae Dascălu – were imprisoned immediately after RFE broadcast the founding declaration of the SLOMR on 4 March 1979. Following the imprisonment of its leaders, the initiative was suppressed rapidly. SLOMR never became a movement. It was just a daring and timely initiative that did not receive adequate support, neither from the part of the workers nor the intelligentsia, in order to structure itself properly and spread across the country.¹³⁸

Indeed, it is striking that not one of the opposition activities evolved into an opposition movement. The mutual mistrust between technical intelligentsia and the workers contributed to such a situation. It is also worth mentioning that during the 1989 revolution, many of the actions that led to the demise of the regime were conducted “from below.” For instance, this author, who worked for three years (1987–1989) as an engineer at the Romlux Tîrgovişte enterprise, witnessed the way in which the factory personnel reacted to the news that revolutionaries took over the Romanian Radio and Television on 22 December 1989 at noon. The first to storm the factory gates in order to march downtown and assault the building of the RCP County Council were mostly workers. True, they were accompanied by some engineers and technicians, but the bulk of the engineers joined the revolution after the working hours.

¹³⁸ On the Securitate reports concerning the SLOMR see Mihai Pelin, *Operaţiunile “Melita” şi “Eterul.” Istoria Europei Libere prin documente de Securitate* (The “Grinder” and “Aether” operations: History of Radio Free Europe through documents of the Securitate) (Bucharest: Editura Albatros, 1999), 172–78. A work that focuses on a prominent case of working-class dissent, that of Vasile Paraschiv, also provides relevant details on SLOMR. See Oana Ionel and Dragoş Marcu, “Vasile Paraschiv şi ‘Securitatea lui’” (Vasile Paraschiv and “his Securitate”), in Vasile Paraschiv, *Lupta mea pentru sindicate libere în România: Terorismul politic organizat de statul comunist* (My struggle for free trade unions in Romania: The political terrorism organized by the communist state) ed. by Oana Ionel and Dragoş Marcu (Iaşi: Editura Polirom, 2005), 367–71.

In terms of dissidence and public protests by intellectuals, after the termination of the Goma movement (1977) and the suppression of the SLOMR (1979), the first major act of dissidence belonged to Doina Cornea, a lecturer in French at the University of Cluj. In August 1982, RFE broadcast an open letter by Doina Cornea on the crisis of the educational system in Romania.¹³⁹ Over the next seven years, Doina Cornea represented one of the most powerful dissident voices in communist Romania. She adamantly criticized the Ceaușescu regime in spite of the permanent surveillance and harassment to which the Securitate subjected her. Cornea's last open letter before the collapse of the regime was broadcast by RFE in the autumn of 1989.¹⁴⁰ A promising poet from Bucharest, Dorin Tudoran, decided in 1982 to make public his criticism towards the establishment. Until 1985, when he decided to emigrate, Tudoran radicalized his position and evolved from comments strictly limited to the abuses concerning the literary milieus to the denunciation of the communist system itself. After emigrating and settling in the United States, he remained an acerbic critic of the Ceaușescu regime.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ The complete text of Cornea's open letter is provided in Doina Cornea, *Scrisori deschise și alte texte* (Open letters and other texts) (Bucharest: Editura Humanitas, 1991), 13–17. For more on her bold dissidence, see Doina Cornea, *Libertate? Convorbiri cu Michel Combes* (Freedom? Conversations with Michel Combes) (Bucharest: Editura Humanitas, 1992) and idem, *Jurnal: Ultimele caiete* (Diary: The last notebooks) (Bucharest: Editura Fundației Academia Civică, 2009).

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 126–32.

¹⁴¹ Dorin Tudoran has published a volume of some 600 pages containing a large selection of relevant documents from his Securitate file covering the period 1982–1985. See Dorin Tudoran, *Eu, fiul lor: Dosar de Securitate* (I, their son: Securitate file) (Iași: Editura Polirom, 2010). As for his dissident texts, see for instance “Frig sau frică? Asupra condiției intelectualului român de astăzi” (Cold or fear? On the condition of the contemporary Romanian intellectual) and “Scrisoare adresată lui Nicolae Ceaușescu” (Letter addressed to Nicolae Ceaușescu), both dating from 1984 and republished after 1989 in Tudoran, *Kakistocracy*, 25–30 and 31–76 respectively. See also OSA/RFE Archives, Romanian Fond, 300/60/3/Box 9, File Dissidents: Dorin Tudoran.

Another significant act of opposition belonged to Radu Filipescu, a young engineer from Bucharest. During the period January – May 1983, Filipescu produced and disseminated in Bucharest some thousands anti-Ceaușescu manifestos. Arrested on 7 May, Filipescu was sentenced on 12 September 1983 to ten years in prison for “propaganda against the socialist system.” He was eventually released from prison in 1986 after a sustained international campaign organized by RFE and Amnesty International.¹⁴² Such protests were not singular. Isolated protests abounded during the 1980s but their authors did, or could, not make their acts known abroad. Thus, many courageous acts of opposition simply passed unnoticed in the West and organizations such as RFE or Amnesty International could not intervene. Radu Filipescu confessed that, while in prison, he was astonished to see how many people dared to speak out or disseminate manifestos against the communist regime in Romania.¹⁴³ Physicist Gabriel Andreescu engaged during the period 1984–1987 in dissident activities related mainly to the monitoring of the numerous violations of human rights in communist Romania and the transmission of such information abroad. Towards the late 1980s, he became one of the Romanian dissidents best known in the West.¹⁴⁴ Beginning in 1988, open dissident stances multiplied.

¹⁴² For an account of Filipescu’s dissident actions see Herma Köpernik-Kennel, *Jogging cu Securitatea: Rezistența tânărului Radu Filipescu* (Jogging with the Securitate: The resistance of the young Radu Filipescu) (Bucharest: Editura Universal Dalsi, 1998) esp. 11–84. A copy of a manifesto authored by Filipescu is provided at p.273.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 106–108.

¹⁴⁴ For more on Gabriel Andreescu’s dissent, see his works *Spre o filozofie a dizidenței* (Towards a philosophy of dissent) (Bucharest: Editura Litera, 1992), esp. 155–97, and *L-am urât pe Ceaușescu: Ani, oameni, disidență* (I hated Ceaușescu: Years, people, dissent) (Iași: Editura Polirom, 2009). See also OSA/RFE Archives, Romanian Fond, 300/60/3/Box 6, File Dissidents: Gabriel Andreescu.

In January 1988, an intellectual from the city of Iași, writer Dan Petrescu, openly protested against the Ceaușescu regime. Dan Petrescu's first act of dissidence was an interview he gave in Iași, towards the end of 1987, to the French reporter Jean Stern (pen name Gilles Schiller). The French left wing newspaper *Libération* published the interview on 27 January 1988 under the title "Ceaușescu nu e singurul vinovat" (Ceaușescu is not the only one to be blamed). A second essay, "Mic studiu de anatomia răului" (Short study on the anatomy of evil) was published in *Libération* on 15 February 1988, and was subsequently broadcast by Radio Free Europe. Petrescu's criticism towards the regime was sharp: he stated clearly that it was the communist system to be blamed for Romania's disastrous situation and not solely the person of Nicolae Ceaușescu.¹⁴⁵ From that moment on, in the city of Iași a nucleus of dissidence emerged around the person of Dan Petrescu and his wife, Thérèse Culianu-Petrescu.

Bucharest intellectuals eventually joined the anti-Ceaușescu opposition. On 17 March 1989, the same French newspaper *Libération* published an interview with poet Mircea Dinescu.¹⁴⁶ Until

¹⁴⁵ For Dan Petrescu's own account see Dan Petrescu and Liviu Cangeopol, *Ce-ar mai fi de spus: Convorbiri libere într-o țară ocupată* (What remains to be said: Free conversations in an occupied country) new and rev. ed. (Bucharest: Editura Nemira, 2000). The work at the book started in the spring of 1988 and finished in the autumn of the same year. Subsequently recorded on tape, it was smuggled abroad around Christmas 1988. Unfortunately, the book was never published in the West, apart from some excerpts broadcast by the Voice of America. In 1990, the Minerva Publishing House in Bucharest published a first edition of the book. The 2000 Nemira edition also comprises Dan Petrescu's major essays, "Ceaușescu is not the only one to be blamed" (pp. 231–35) and "Short study on the anatomy of evil" (pp. 236–43).

¹⁴⁶ For the complete text of the interview, see Gilles Schiller [Jean Stern], "Entretien avec Mircea Dinescu," in *Les Temps Modernes* No. 513 (Avril 1989): 17–28.

the publication of the interview, Dinescu had not been a radical dissident and was rather perceived as belonging to the intellectual establishment. Nevertheless, Dinescu's criticism went beyond the current professional issues related to the literary field and was directed against the way in which Romania was ruled. He ridiculed regime's attempts at creating a "new man" able to "feed on ideology and dress in the gross rhetoric of propaganda." Furthermore, Dinescu praised Gorbachev's reforms by saying that in Romania the Soviet leader was perceived as the "Messiah of socialism with human face."¹⁴⁷ What followed was that Dinescu was placed under house arrest. At the same time, his protest did not follow the pattern of "solitary dissidence" that was so characteristic of Romanian dissent. Thus, a number of seven intellectuals, i.e. Geo Bogza, Ștefan Augustin Doinaș, Dan Hăulică, Alexandru Paleologu, Andrei Pleșu, Octavian Paler and Mihai Șora, subsequently joined by other two, Radu Enescu and Alexandru Călinescu, wrote a letter of solidarity with Dinescu. (It is worth mentioning that only Alexandru Călinescu lived in Iași and had links with the most prominent dissident in that city, Dan Petrescu. All the others signatories were from the capital city Bucharest.¹⁴⁸) Although their letter, written on 20 March 1989, was addressed to the head of Writers' Union, Dumitru Radu Popescu, it was a first major gesture of solidarity between regime's opponents.

It is difficult to say if it was just by chance that the first major post-Goma intellectual protests occurred in two major cultural centers of Romania, the cities of Cluj and Iași, but not in the capital city Bucharest. It may be argued that in Bucharest it was more difficult to carry out an open protest due to the permanent surveillance by the Securitate. Nevertheless, from the spring of 1989 onwards, the

¹⁴⁷ See "Romanian Poet Mircea Dinescu Criticizes Ceausescu's Policies and Appeals for Reforms," Romanian Fond, Unit No. 300/60/3/7, File Dissidents: Dinescu Mircea, OSA/RFE Archives, 2–3.

¹⁴⁸ See Cristina Petrescu, "On dissidence in Ceaușescu's Romania," 337–38.

situation changed significantly. Six former communist officials wrote a highly critical open letter to Ceaușescu. Nine prominent intellectuals publicly expressed their solidarity with Dinescu. Slowly, group protests were replacing the isolated dissident acts by courageous individuals. In November 1989, dissident Dan Petrescu initiated a campaign of collecting signatures against the reelection of Ceaușescu at the Fourteenth Congress of the RCP. Petrescu, who, one should be reminded, was living in the Moldavian city of Iași, contacted Doina Cornea, who was living in the Transylvanian city of Cluj. It was for the first time when prominent dissidents were trying to organize a joint action against the regime. Another story, which is telling of the efforts and vacillations of the intellectuals who felt that they should do something to protest against the communist rule, is that of the “letter of the eighteen.” According to writer Stelian Tănase, the idea of writing a letter of protest against the cultural policies of the regime emerged during a discussion he had with Alexandru Paleologu, an intellectual from an older generation who was imprisoned on political grounds in the late 1950s.¹⁴⁹ It took, however, until mid-December for the signatures to be collected and the letter transmitted abroad.¹⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the fact that eighteen intellectuals eventually managed to become solidary in their protest in the autumn of 1989 indicates that something had changed by that time: a timid but shared feeling of solidarity was gradually replacing the “egoism of small groups.”

It was, however, too late for a dissident movement to take shape and give birth to a political opposition able to fill the power vacuum

¹⁴⁹ The conversations between the two were published after 1989 as Alexandru Paleologu and Stelian Tănase, *Sfidarea memoriei: Convorbiri, aprilie 1988 – octombrie 1989* (The defiance of memory: Conversations, April 1988 – October 1989) (Bucharest: Editura Du Style, 1996). On Paleologu’s prison experience see especially pp. 180–223.

¹⁵⁰ Tănase, *The official wintertime*, 138 and 181.

in the afternoon of 22 December 1989. What some intellectuals managed to do that day was to speak to the large crowds gathered in the Palace Square in downtown Bucharest and argue forcefully and convincingly that the monopoly of the RCP was over.¹⁵¹ In other words, they told the people that it was not about an anti-Ceaușescu uprising, but about *an anti-Communist revolution*. Although short-lived, that was an important moment of the 1989 Romanian revolution. At the same time, in order to have a complete picture of the mechanism that led to the bloody demise of the communist regime in Romania, one should also address the issue of the perceptions and actions “from below.” It is the purpose of the next section to address this subject.

Workers and peasant-workers in a working-class “paradise”

This section intends to shed some light on the intricate and ambivalent relationship between the industrial workers and the communist regime in Romania, and thus explain the way in which mass protest developed and contributed to the final demise of the regime in December 1989. What was, actually, the role of the Romanian working class in the final demise of communism in that country? The answer to such a simple question is by no means facile all the more that the class character of the popular uprising in Timișoara, which sparked the 1989 revolution, is seriously questionable. Nevertheless, one must bear in mind that the Romanian revolution of 1989 occurred and ensued almost completely in large urban areas. Thus, the revolution broke out in the city of Timișoara, the capital of a highly industrialized region, i.e. the Timiș County, where workers made up around 60 percent of the total population.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 191–92.

Therefore, a discussion of the patterns of working-class co-optation and protest under communism is relevant in explaining not only why the Romanian revolution of 1989 was sparked in the city of Timișoara, but also what made possible the appearance of a broad, though short-lived, cross-class alliance between workers, professionals, intellectuals and students in December 1989.

Due to the lack of resources, under communist rule the urbanization process was not able to keep the pace with the industrialization process. Consequently, the Romanian working class underwent an accelerated transformation that led to the gradual emergence of two major categories of workers: (1) the “genuine” workers; and (2) the commuting villagers or the peasant-workers. (Peasant-workers must not be confused with the agricultural workers employed by state farms; in the terms of the present work, it is about industrial workers that commuted daily from their villages to their workplaces located in urban areas.) As one can easily observe, this categorization differs from the classic one that discerns between skilled and unskilled workers. The distinction between “genuine” workers and peasant-workers takes into consideration the development of distinct subcultures of resistance against the regime due to the particular situation in which each of these categories of workers found itself throughout the 1970s and 1980s. “Genuine” workers represented a category of workers that severed their roots with countryside, moved to towns where they were employed mostly in industry, and thus were dependent on the salary they received. By the end of 1980s, in the conditions of the severe crisis faced by the Ceaușescu regime, this category of workers was increasingly forced to think in terms of biological survival and thus was more prone to engage in open protests. For their part, the peasant-workers represented a category that was less affected by the economic crisis. During the period of food shortages, i.e. 1981–1989, such people were able to obtain the necessary foodstuffs for survival and thus their potential for protest was lower. The peasant-worker is a good example

of a strategy of the individual to survive in the conditions of a severe crisis: a job in industry in the nearby town, and food supplies from the little farm he or she owned in the village. However, such a strategy became less successful after the introduction of a strict system of quotas and increased control by the authorities of the output of the small individual farms.

To sum up, the category of “genuine” workers was the first and most affected sector of society in the conditions of economic crisis. As shown below, beginning in the mid-1970s four large and highly industrialized areas of communist Romania – the counties of Constanța, Brașov, Hunedoara and Timiș – attracted the largest number of internal migrants in the country, many of whom came from remote and less developed regions of Moldavia. In these areas, as the interregional long distance migration figures show, came into being a relatively numerous class of workers relying only on the salary they received in industry – a class of “genuine” workers. One should stress once again that the term “genuine” has to be understood in the sense of a category of workers almost entirely dependent on the salary received in industry and not in the sense of worker-father origins. A complex analysis that takes into account among others: working-class traditions of protest; trends of long distance internal migration; the process of urbanization and industrialization; and demographic data supports such an assertion. Until the late 1970s, the category of “genuine” workers benefited from the policy of industrialization and urbanization enforced by the communist regime. Beginning in the late 1970s, however, the same category of workers proved to be the most vulnerable in face of the deep economic crisis. Between 1977 and 1989, the most important protests from below occurred in workplaces where “genuine” workers constituted a majority: in the Jiu Valley (Hunedoara County) in 1977 and in Brașov (the capital of the Brașov county) in 1987. As already mentioned, in the late 1980s there were in Romania four highly industrialized urban areas – the counties of Constanța, Brașov, Hunedoara, and Timiș – where

the number of workers coming from other regions of the country was particularly high. When the structural crisis deepened, the “genuine” workers in those areas were severely affected by food shortages, strict rationing, and non-payment of wages, and were thus forced to think in terms of biological survival. In one of these areas, i.e. the city of Timișoara, the capital of the Timiș County, the Romanian revolution of 1989 was sparked.

In order to discuss the patterns of protest and compliance by the working class under the communist regime, the period between 1948 and 1989 has been divided into three main periods: (1) 1948–1958; a period in which revolts and strikes occurred in all major traditional working-class environments: Jiu Valley, Prahova Valley, Bucharest etc.; (2) 1958–1977; a period characterized by relative quiescence, in which no major working-class protests occurred; and (3) 1977–1989; the period of crisis and decline, characterized by the major working-class protests of Jiu Valley (1977), Motru (1981) and Brașov (1987), as well as by the uprising in Timișoara that marked the beginning of the 1989 revolution.

Workers in a people’s democracy, 1948–1958

From the late 1940s onwards, the Romanian economy sustained a high growth rate focusing on steel, petrochemical, and machine-building industries. Employment in the secondary sector became dominant, while employment in primary and tertiary sectors declined. By 1956, the tertiary sector, which dominated urban employment in 1930, lost its first position to manufacturing.¹⁵² Many of the newly declared towns were mining and heavy manufacturing centers, where employment in the secondary sector was dominant. For instance, in 1956, in the city of Hunedoara and in the mining centers of

¹⁵² Ronnås, *Urbanization in Romania*, 156.

Jiu Valley as Lupeni, Petrila and Vulcan, the employment in the secondary sector exceeded 80 percent of the total active population.¹⁵³ Throughout the period, the working class grew steadily, from 23.7 percent of the total population in 1956, to 39.9 percent in 1966, and 54.3 percent in 1977. In 1960, from a total occupied population of 9,537,700 persons, of which 3,208,400 were employed in the state sector, 2,212,500 were workers.¹⁵⁴

Accounts regarding the low standard of life of the working class during the 1950s abound. After nationalization, the Gheorghiu-Dej regime did not devise a coherent plan of economic development. In the working-class milieu, the standard of life was extremely poor and insufficient payment resulted in corruption and thefts from state enterprises. Basically, the goods stolen were of two types: (1) materials to be sold or exchanged with other necessary goods or food; and (2) materials for the improvement of the household. An electrician who worked between 1951 and 1954 in the Metallurgical Combine Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej in Hunedoara states that the workers stole cables, tin plates, or “anything else they could lay their hands on.”¹⁵⁵ The same report also mentions some of the most acute

¹⁵³ For instance, 84.4 percent of the total population active in industries was employed in the secondary sector in the city of Hunedoara, 81.4 percent in Lupeni, 80.5 percent in Petrila and 82.0 percent in Vulcan. For comparison, in 1930, in the city of Hunedoara 38.8 percent of the population was employed in manufacturing, mining and construction. In 1956, in the city of Braşov, out of the total population active in industries, 60.7 percent was employed in the secondary sector, while 36.2 percent was employed in the tertiary sector. For comparison, in 1930, 39.1 percent of Braşov’s population was employed in the secondary sector, while 38.6 percent was employed in the tertiary sector See Table 27, *Industrial Structure of Romanian Towns in 1956 – Active Population in Primary (I), Secondary (II) and Tertiary (III) Employment*, in Ronnås, *Urbanization in Romania*, 359–62.

¹⁵⁴ Tsantis and Pepper, *Romania*, 542.

¹⁵⁵ Romanian Fond, Unit No. 300/60/1/837, Item 11095/54: 3, OSA/RFE Archives.

problems the Hunedoara workers were facing. For instance, on March 1954, Gheorghe Apostol, the vice-president of the Romanian Council of Ministers, himself a former railway worker in the interwar period, visited the combine on the occasion of the inauguration of a new blast furnace. With that occasion, a delegation of workers went to meet with vice-president Apostol and submitted a list of requests of which the most important were: (1) a raise in wages; (2) the supply of protective equipment by the factory; (3) the timely supply of firewood in the winter; and (4) the speedy solution of the housing problems, as the workers stayed in barracks. The answer they received was that the government would solve their problems, but no improvements occurred after Apostol's visit.¹⁵⁶ An account dated December 1955 describes the living conditions of railway workers in the Grivița district of Bucharest, considered a communist "bastion." According to the said report, railway workers who worked as locomotive conductors and could travel throughout the country used to buy foodstuffs such as cheese, eggs, meat, etc. in the province at lower prices and sold them to relatives and friends in the capital city Bucharest in order to earn some extra money.¹⁵⁷ Alcohol consumption was another major problem. A report dating from June 1958 refers to the extensive consumption of alcohol among the workers, who on paydays used to "rush to bars and restaurants and often return home without a penny." Consequently, on paydays many wives gathered in the front of the factories waiting for their husbands in order to prevent them from spending all the salary on alcohol.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Romanian Fond, Unit No. 300/60/1/837, Item 11095/54: 3–4, OSA/RFE Archives.

¹⁵⁷ Romanian Fond, Unit No. 300/60/1/837, Item 4019/56: 4, OSA/RFE Archives.

¹⁵⁸ Romanian Fond, Unit No. 300/60/1/837, Item 4623/58: 2, OSA/RFE Archives.

Unrest did occur in working-class milieus during the period under scrutiny. Although scarce, the available information indicates that between August 1950 and August 1958 at least twenty-one strikes and revolts occurred in communist Romania.¹⁵⁹ From the total, 13 occurred in regions with a strong tradition of working-class protest, such as the Grivița Railway Repair Shops in Bucharest, the Jiu Valley, the Prahova Valley, and the Reșița Steel Mills.¹⁶⁰ Relatively important strikes took place at the Galați and Brăila shipyards in June and December 1951, respectively. Interestingly enough, no major protest took place at the Constanța shipyard, the most important shipyard in the country. It is important, however, to stress that during the period 1948–1958 all major protests occurred in traditional working-class environments, where traditions of self-organization developed in the interwar period were still present. Such workplaces were: the coal mines in the Jiu Valley; the Prahova Valley oil industry refineries; the fluvial ports of Galați, Brăila and Turnu Severin; and some large manufacturing enterprises.¹⁶¹ Another account provides some details on a spontaneous protest that allegedly occurred at the Grivița Railway Repair Shops during the period 1–3 February 1952. The Grivița railway shops represented a stronghold

¹⁵⁹ For an annotated list of thirty-six working class protests that occurred in communist Romania during the period 1950–1989, see Annex 2 to Dragoș Petrescu, “Workers and Peasant-Workers in a Working-Class ‘Paradise’: Patterns of Working-Class Protest in Communist Romania,” in Peter Hübner, Christoph Kleßmann, and Klaus Tenfelde, eds., *Arbeiter im Staatssozialismus: Ideologischer Anspruch und Soziale Wirklichkeit* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2005), 136–39.

¹⁶⁰ Under the communist regime the official name of the Railway Repair Shops was Grivița Roșie (Red Grivița) Railway Repair Shops, as a reminder of the interwar workers’ revolt.

¹⁶¹ In this respect, one can mention the Reșița Steel Mills, the Ploiești Oilfield Equipment Enterprise, the Bucharest enterprises Grivița, 23 August, and Vulcan, the Brăila Cement Factory, the Baia-Mare Chemical Combine, the Victoria Arad Tool Factory and the Brașov Explosives Plant.

of the Romanian working class, where a major strike was organized in February 1933.¹⁶² The strike, on which not much information is available, broke out after the enforcement of the monetary reform of 28 January 1952, which practically ruined workers' savings. According to the said account, the workers ceased their protest and returned to work only after Gheorghiu-Dej, the leader of the RWP, himself a former worker at Grivița in the interwar period, came to negotiate with them.¹⁶³

To conclude this section, it may be argued that during the period analyzed a majority of the workers still believed that the party leaders would solve their problems. The examples of the Grivița workers returning to work, in February 1952, after the leader of the Romanian

¹⁶² On 17 January 1933, the Al. Vaida-Voevod government applied the so-called "third sacrificial curve," which meant the reduction of wages by 10 to 12.5 percent. This resulted in demonstrations and strikes in the major industrial areas of the country. On 2 February 1933, the workers from the Grivița Railway Repair Shops in Bucharest went on strike asking for: (1) a wage-increase of 40 percent; and (2) stoppage of dismissals from among workers and re-employment of the already fired ones. The management agreed to satisfy some of the workers' demands and the strike ceased the same day in the evening. During the night of 3 to 4 February, however, the authorities declared a state of siege and operated massive arrests among the strikers. On 15 February 1933, the workers at the same Grivița workshops went on strike demanding the liberation of the workers arrested after the strike of 2 February and the enforcement of the agreement signed that day. In response to an occupation strike started on 15 February, the army stormed the Grivița workshops on 16 February. The army attack left 3 workers killed and 16 seriously wounded. See Constantiniu, *A sincere history of the Romanian people*, 340.

¹⁶³ Romanian Fond, Unit. No. 300/60/1/837, Item V-1266/S (June 17, 1952): 1–2, OSA/RFE Archives. Gheorghiu-Dej worked as a railway worker at Grivița in the early 1930s and took part in the preparation of the Grivița strike of January–February 1933, for which he was sentenced to 10 years in prison. For more on Gheorghiu-Dej's term in prison see Câmpeanu, *Ceaușescu, the countdown years*, 39–84.

communists promised to solve their problems, or the Hunedoara workers presenting themselves, in March 1954, with a list of requests to Gheorghe Apostol, the vice-president of the Romanian Council of Ministers, indicates that during that period the distinction between “us” and “them” did not operate among the Romanian workers. This was due most probably to the proletarian background of many of the communist leaders of the time and therefore during that period a majority of the workers did not consider the leaders of the Party as a “red bourgeoisie.” Moreover, the analysis of the working-class protests of the period 1948–1958 reveals that the demands put forward by the workers were strictly related to the living conditions and did not turn political.

A “new social contract,” 1958–1977

In spite of the many accounts that suggest that workers were dissatisfied with the wages and working conditions, no major working-class protests occurred during the period 1958–1977. To date, no systematic research has been carried out on the topic of working-class protest in communist Romania and consequently one can only rely on the scarce and incomplete information available. Thus, it seems that a sole relevant protest occurred during the period 1958–1977, i.e. a strike organized by the Jiu Valley miners in the year 1972, of which not much is known. Therefore, at the present stage of the research it may only be stated that no major working-class protests occurred during the mentioned period, even though small-scale, spontaneous revolts with no political content certainly occurred. The absence of confirmed working-class revolts or strikes during the period between 1958 and 1977 needs a detailed explanation. Thus, it is this author’s opinion that during the said period the Romanian working class engaged in a “new social contract” as defined by Antonin J.

Liehm,¹⁶⁴ or a “tacit social contract” (“tacit deal”). As defined by George Schöpflin, such a “tacit deal” meant: “The right ‘not to work hard,’ together with nearly absolute job security” against granting to the party the “sole right to involve itself into politics.”¹⁶⁵ The communist regime proved to be quite successful in co-opting a majority of the working class and this was also due to the policy of sustained industrialization and urbanization enforced especially after 1956.

A confident and experienced by now political elite, shepherded by Gheorghiu-Dej,¹⁶⁶ with an increased room to maneuver after the July 1958 withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Romania, engaged in an ambitious strategy of political survival based on economic development and nation-building. As already discussed, the Ceaușescu regime followed until the early 1970s the developmental pattern and the policy

¹⁶⁴ “The notion of a *new social contract* [emphasis mine] in East and East Central Europe suggests that the population of those areas had ceded to the authorities its rights to free speech and assembly, its right to organize, and various other basic democratic rights in exchange for certain implicit guarantees. These include assured employment that, even if providing only mediocre wages permits a standard of living above the poverty level. Little real effort, personal involvement, or individual initiative is required. The contract also implies the state’s provision of important social services and a degree of social security. As long as the contract is honored by both parties, it provides both with a set of real or perceived advantages. Social and political calm prevail, and there is no need for labor camps, revolts, terrorism, or more than a minimal number of political prisoners.” Antonin J. Liehm, “The New Social Contract and the Parallel Polity,” in Jane Leftwich Curry, ed., *Dissent in Eastern Europe* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1983), 174.

¹⁶⁵ George Schöpflin, *Politics in Eastern Europe* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 150.

¹⁶⁶ Corneliu Coposu, the late leader of the Christian-Democratic National Peasant Party is telling. Coposu has emphasized Dej’s transformation from a humble worker animated by communist ideas, who seemed rather intimidated by Ana Pauker and Vasile Luca, to a cynical RCP leader who ordered the assassination of Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu. See Corneliu Coposu, *Dialoguri cu Vartan Arachelian* (Dialogues with Vartan Arachelian) (Bucharest: Editura Anastasia, 1991), 76–77. See also Corneliu Coposu, *Confesiuni: Dialoguri cu Doina Alexandru* (Confessions: Dialogues with Doina Alexandru) (Bucharest: Editura Anastasia, 1996).

of increased short-term consumption established by Gheorghiu-Dej in the early 1960s. Consequently, between 1964 and 1974 Romania experienced a “golden period” of some economic achievements, characterized by an accentuated pro-consumption economic policy.¹⁶⁷ As a result of the process of accelerated urbanization, between 1960 and 1977 the percentage of urban population grew from 32.1 percent to 47.5 percent, while the percentage of rural population declined from 67.9 percent in 1960 to 52.5 percent in 1977. The rapid industrialization of the country resulted in a growth of the population involved in industry. Consequently, the labor force employed in industry grew from 19.2 percent in 1960 to 30.6 percent in 1975, while the population involved in agriculture (except for forestry) declined from 56.5 percent in 1960 to 37.8 percent in 1975. In absolute numbers, the population employed in agriculture decreased from 6,233,000 persons in 1960 to 3,837,000 persons in 1975, whereas the total labor force increased from 9,538,000 persons in 1960 to 10,150,000 persons in 1975. Between 1956 and 1977, the Romanian working class – “blue collar workers,” including foremen – grew from 23.7 percent of total population in 1956 to 39.9 percent in 1966 and to 54.3 percent in 1977. In absolute numbers, the working class grew steadily, reaching 2,212,500 persons in 1960; 3,018,700 in 1965; 3,867,800 in 1970 and 4,089,100 in 1972.¹⁶⁸ However, the urbanization program was not able to keep the pace with the industrialization program, so that a considerable commuting workforce came into existence in the early 1970s.¹⁶⁹ According to an evaluation of 1973, in some factories in the Braşov County around 50 percent of

¹⁶⁷ Such a consumption-oriented economic policy led to a rise of population's expectations, but, on the long term, conveyed to economic stagnation and debt accumulation.

¹⁶⁸ Tsantis and Pepper, *Romania*, 542–43.

¹⁶⁹ See also Table 28, Industrial Structure of Romanian Towns in 1966 – Active Population in Primary (I), Secondary (II) and Tertiary (III) Employment, in Ronnås, *Urbanization in Romania*, 363–68.

the workforce was composed of commuting villagers.¹⁷⁰ Similarly, in the case of the Pitești Automobile Enterprise, 57.5 percent of the total workforce was composed of commuting villagers. Moreover, 8.7 percent of the total workforce of the Pitești Enterprise was composed of long-distance intra-county commuters.¹⁷¹ All in all, the commuting villagers represented a quick-growing class of peasant-workers, whose backgrounds, habits, and life-styles differed sharply from those of their urban-born or urban-based fellow workers.

Although the number of commuters grew constantly during the period analyzed, the transport conditions for the commuting workers did not improve much. Considering the distances to be covered, many workers were obliged to go between 20 and 60 kilometers by train or by trucks provided by their enterprises. In many cases, commuters had to walk several kilometers from the nearest railway station to their village. The following example describes a normal working day for a commuting villager, considering the train as a means of transport and a commuting distance of 60 kilometers. At the time, the average speed of local trains in Romania was approximately 45 kilometers per hour on main lines and 30 kilometers per hour on branch lines, due to the large number of stations. Consequently, the distance of 60 kilometers was covered in one hour and a half to two hours per trip, and thus the total commuting time amounted to some 3 or 4 hours per working day.¹⁷² Let us consider the working program at the “Steagul Roșu” (Red Flag) Truck Factory in Brașov, i.e. 6.30 a.m. to 14.30 p.m. Thus, a commuter had to wake up at 4.00 a.m. – in the case that the railway

¹⁷⁰ Shafir, *Romania: Politics, Economics and Society*, 141.

¹⁷¹ As already mentioned, Nicolae Ceaușescu inaugurated the Pitești Automobile Enterprise on 20 August 1968. The next day, 21 August, he would live “his finest hour” and deliver the famous speech condemning the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the WTO troops.

¹⁷² Tsantis and Pepper, *Romania*, 323.

station was close enough to his or her village – in order to arrive at the factory at 6.30 a.m. When the working day was over, commuters could get home at 5 p.m. under the most favorable conditions, but in many cases, they got home around 6 p.m.

A survey of the workforce at the Pitești Automobile Enterprise, dated 31 July 1971, indicated that 42.5 percent of the total spent up to 30 minutes to arrive to the factory, 48.8 percent spent up to 60 minutes, while 8.7 percent needed around 100 minutes.¹⁷³ Prior to 1957, the commuting workforce had to walk some 4 km from the nearest railway station to the factory. In harsh winters, many workers were forced to stay overnight in the factory, because of the bad roads and poor transport conditions.¹⁷⁴ After 5 or 6 p.m., the vast majority of the commuters entered the “second shift.” As John W. Cole puts it, the “second shift” was related to the activity the commuting workers did in agriculture after a day of work in the factory and refers to the entire process of production and distribution, which was carried on through “non-corporate social relations.”¹⁷⁵ The indirect costs posed by the “second shift” activity to the state sector were high since, due to the difficulties of commuting, workers were often too tired to do good work, and their sleepiness during working hours caused numerous accidents.¹⁷⁶

The analysis of the period between 1958 and 1977 suggests two important trends related to the Romanian working class. First, the traditional working-class environments, with traditions established in the interwar period, were “diluted” through a massive input of

¹⁷³ Ștefănescu, Moroșan and Soare, *Monografia Uzinei de Autoturisme Pitești*, 88.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 20–21, 26.

¹⁷⁵ John W. Cole, “Family, Farm, and Factory: Rural Workers in Contemporary Romania,” in Daniel Nelson, ed., *Romania in the 1980s* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1981), 93.

¹⁷⁶ Romanian Fond, Unit No. 300/60/1/390, Item 4623/58: 3, OSA/RFE Archives.

rural-born workers. Such a phenomenon contributed to the emergence of a working class with a reduced sense of cohesion and solidarity. Moreover, the existence of a large category of commuting villagers lowered the potential for protest in such working-class milieus. For instance, as mentioned in an account dated December 1955, only the older workers at the Grivița railway shops still displayed a certain sense of solidarity.¹⁷⁷ Secondly, the process of long distance internal migration resulted in the creation of a category of “genuine” workers. The term “genuine,” however, has to be understood in the sense of a category that had to rely almost entirely on the salary obtained from the “socialist” sector, lacking traditions and whose sense of solidarity developed only slowly. Nevertheless, one should not neglect the high potential for protest of this category of workers in the context of the severe economic crisis of the 1980s. The “genuine” workers were at the origins of the two most significant working-class protests that occurred in communist Romania in August 1977 and November 1987, and they were also instrumental in the outbreak of the Romanian revolution in the city of Timișoara in December 1989.

Economic decline and working-class unrest, 1977–1989

From the partial information gathered until now results that, between 1977 and 1989, 13 noticeable working-class protests – mainly strikes – occurred in Ceaușescu’s Romania. Out of the total, three strikes occurred in the mining industry, two in the petrochemical industry and seven in the manufacturing industry, especially in the machine-building sector. Of all these, however, two protests were by far the most important: (1) the August 1977 strike organized by the miners

¹⁷⁷ Romanian Fond, Unit No. 300/60/1/837, Item 4019/56: 5, OSA/RFE Archives.

in the Jiu Valley basin; and (2) the November 1987 revolt of the Braşov workers.

The Jiu Valley strike of 2–3 August 1977 put an end to the period of “tacit deal” between the communist regime and the Romanian working class. The real proportions of the Jiu Valley strike are still difficult to evaluate. One of the most cited witness accounts has been that of a participant to the strike, Istvan Hosszu, who gave a six-hour interview on the events after he left Romania in 1986. Hosszu affirmed that between 30,000 and 35,000 miners joined the strike, a figure that, however, exceeds the total number of miners employed by the ten mines in the Jiu Valley basin.¹⁷⁸ To date, the most accurate analysis of the Jiu Valley strike was carried out by two researchers from Petroşani, Marian Boboc and Mihai Barbu, who benefited from their socialization among miners in the Jiu Valley and thus combined oral history interviews with a thorough examination of the Securitate files on the matter. Let us have a look at the number of miners employed in 1977 at each of the ten mines in the Jiu Valley: Lonea – 2,345; Petriţa – 2,772; Dâlja – 1,823; Livezeni – 943; Aninoasa – 2,508; Vulcan – 3,599; Paroşeni – 1,726; Lupeni – 4,825; Bărbăţeni – 870; and Uricani – 2,116.¹⁷⁹ All in all, the total number of miners employed at the time of the August 1977 strike at the Jiu Valley mines amounted to 23,527. It should be mentioned also that the critical mass of miners that determined the outbreak of the strike was composed of the third shift that just finished the working day and the first shift that was preparing for entering the mine.

¹⁷⁸ For a summary of Hosszu’s account see Romanian Fond, Unit 300/60/1/837, Item 1750/86, OSA/RFE Archives (hereafter cited as Item 1750/86). See also Mihai Barbu and Gheorghe Chirvasă, *După 20 de ani: Lupeni ’77–Lupeni ’97* (20 years after: Lupeni 1977–Lupeni 1997) (Petroşani: Cotidianul “Matinal” & Editura Cameleonul, 1997).

¹⁷⁹ Marian Boboc and Mihai Barbu, *Strict secret: Lupeni 1977 – Filajul continuă!* (Top secret: Lupeni 1977 – Surveillance goes on!) (Craiova: Editura MJM, 2007), 30, 49, 80, 90, 98, 144, 178, 354, 470 and 528.

The strike was sparked by new legislation concerning pensions, i.e. *Legea nr. 3 din 30 iunie 1977 privind pensiile de asigurări sociale de stat și asistența socială* (Law no. 3 of 30 June 1977 concerning state social pensions and social assistance). The law was adopted by the Romanian Grand National Assembly on 30 June and was subsequently published in the Official Bulletin of the Socialist Republic Romania on 8 July. Miners were particularly concerned with a series of limitations introduced by the new law as compared with the old legislation (Law no. 27/1966) such as: the raise of the retirement age from fifty to fifty-two, and the cancellation or restriction of various categories of sickness benefits and entitlements to disability pension (especially with regard to the so-called “third-degree disability pension”).¹⁸⁰ The new legislation came on a backdrop of growing dissatisfaction among the miners in the Jiu Valley with the conditions of work and the obligation to work on non-working days, as well as with the disruptions in the supply with basic foodstuffs. In addition, a central element of discontent for each and every miner was the extension of the workday from six to eight hours; in this respect, it was a general agreement that the workday should be reduced to six hours. Overall, the Jiu Valley strike represented a mature working-class protest. The main aspects of the strike can be summarized as follows: (1) the miners displayed a high level of self-organization; a strike command post was established at Gate No. 2 of the most important mine in the area, the Lupeni mine, which became the focal point of the strike; (2) the strike was non-violent, sit-down, and round-the-clock; and (3) the miners prepared a list of demands and asked to negotiate directly with Ceaușescu, face to face.

¹⁸⁰ For the complete text of the Law no.3/1977, see Ioan Velica and Dragoș Ștefan Velica, *Lupeni '77: Laboratorul puterii* (Lupeni 1977: The laboratory of power) (Deva: Editura Polidava, 2002), 39–71. For a discussion on the limitations introduced by Law no. 3/1977 as compared with Law no. 27/1966, see Boboc and Barbu, *Top secret: Lupeni 1977*, 12–15.

(Constantin Dobre – a miner from the Paroşeni mine and a key participant to the strike – states that the final list of demands had 23 points.)¹⁸¹

On 2 August 1977, a delegation of high Party officials, led by Ilie Verdet, was sent to negotiate with the miners.¹⁸² After the refusal of the strikers to discuss with the Bucharest delegation, Ceauşescu arrived at Lupeni on 3 August at noon and, in front of a determined but not violent crowd, practically agreed with the list of demands. The fact that Ceauşescu agreed to consider workers demands resulted in the termination of the strike. At the same time, Ceauşescu did not use the force to suppress the strike: the repression followed gradually, during the winter of 1977–1978. In spite of rumors, the strike leaders were not killed by the Securitate, but they were forced to move to

¹⁸¹ The list of demands included among others: (1) the reinstatement of a six-hour working day; (2) retirement at age of fifty in the conditions of twenty years of effective activity; (3) the reinstatement of sickness benefits and entitlements to disability pensions restricted by the new law of pensions; (4) the improvement of working conditions, as well as adequate food supplies and medical care in the Jiu Valley; (5) the establishment of light industry enterprises in the Jiu Valley to provide work to miners' wives and daughters; (6) the establishment of workers' commissions at the enterprise level, and their empowerment to control managers' activity; (7) an agreement to be signed providing that protesting miners would suffer no reprisals; and (8) the national media to report accurately on the causes and progress of miners' strike. For the complete list of demands as provided by Dobre, see Mihai Barbu and Marian Boboc, *Lupeni '77: Sfânta Varvara versus Tante Varvara* (Lupeni '77: Saint Varvara versus Tante Varvara) (Cluj: Editura Fundației pentru Studii Europene, 2005), 215–16.

¹⁸² The delegation was composed of Ilie Verdet, prime-viceprime minister, Gheorghe Pană, president of the General Union of Romanian Trade Unions and Constantin Băbălău, the minister of mining industry. High officers from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Securitate accompanied the Party officials. For details on the negotiations between the strikers and the Party officials see the witness account by Dumitru Iordache, a miner from the Lupeni mine, in Barbu and Boboc, *Lupeni '77: Saint Varvara versus Tante Varvara*, 164–76.

other regions where they remained under the supervision of the secret police. A majority of the demands put forward by the miners were satisfied for a short period of time, including the improvement of medical care and food supplies. Some improvements were made towards creating jobs for the families of those employed in the mining sector through investments in the light industry of the Jiu Valley. To conclude, the Jiu Valley strike was the best-conducted working-class protest in communist Romania. At the same time, the strike did not turn into an open anti-regime protest. The protesters understood that Ceaușescu had the power to solve their problems, which does not mean that they really trusted the supreme leader of the RCP, and therefore demanded to negotiate directly with him. The existence of working-class traditions in the area – witnesses to the strike mention that the protesters shouted “Lupeni 1929!” as a reminder of the interwar miners’ revolt that took place also in Lupeni – and the dangerous activity performed created a special sense of cohesion among miners, which allowed them to conduct a large-scale protest.¹⁸³

The historic importance of the Brașov workers protest of 15 November 1987 resides in the fact that it turned into a violent anti-

¹⁸³ The 1929 Lupeni strike occurred after a long period of negotiations for the signing of the new collective work contract in the mining industry. In order to sign the new contract, a list of requests was raised by miners’ representatives, among which the most important were: (1) that it be respected the eight hours working day program, (2) a wage raise of 20 per cent; (3) the payment of salaries on a regular basis; (4) the management was required to cease firing workers and to re-employ the already fired miners; and (5) the abolition of the system of fines applied to workers. After eight months of negotiations it was decided to call for a general strike in the Jiu Valley. On 5 August 1929, in the morning, however, only the Lupeni miners went on strike. On 6 August 1929, in the morning, the authorities decided to repress the strike. According to the official figures, between 20 and 30 miners were killed and over 100 wounded that day. See Mircea Mușat and Ion Ardeleanu, *România după Marea Unire 1918–1933* (Romania after the Great Unification 1918–1933) vol. II (Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1986), 620.

Ceaușescu revolt. In the conditions of a deep social and economic crisis, the initial economic requests of the workers turned quickly into political demands. In the case of the Brașov working-class uprising, a number of Brașov dwellers also joined the workers in their protest, which was an indication of the growing dissatisfaction of the population in general with the Ceaușescu regime. Whereas the Jiu Valley miners were still convinced in 1977 that Ceaușescu would solve their problems, the Brașov protesters shouted “Jos Ceaușescu!” (Down with Ceaușescu!)¹⁸⁴ The revolt in Brașov took place in a totally different context than the 1977 strike, since it occurred in the midst of an acute economic crisis, during a period characterized by all kinds of shortages: food, gasoline, natural gas, heating fuel, and electricity supply.

The Brașov revolt was initiated by a part of the Steagul Roșu (Red Flag) truck plant workers, in response to the wage cuts imposed by the management for the non-fulfillment of production targets. In the context of chronic food shortages and heating restrictions (in a mountain area), the wage cuts announcement provoked the workers' revolt. The research carried out so far permits a fair reconstruction of the Brașov events.¹⁸⁵ Everything started during the third (night) shift at the Steagul Roșu truck plant. Workers stopped working at 6.00 a.m. and around 8.00 a.m. marched off from the plant, in the direction of the city center. According to an eyewitness account, at the beginning there were 300–350 protesters. Because on that day local elections were held in Romania, the police forces were dispersed

¹⁸⁴ Deletant, *Ceaușescu and the Securitate*, 250.

¹⁸⁵ See Romulus Rusan, ed., *O zi de toamnă, cândva: 15 noiembrie 1987 – Brașov* (One day of autumn, someday: 15 November 1987 – Brașov) (Bucharest: Editura Fundației Academia Civică, 2004); Marius Oprea and Stejărel Olaru, eds., *Ziua care nu se uită: 15 noiembrie 1987, Brașov* (The day one cannot forget: 15 November 1987, Brașov) (Iași: Editura Polirom, 2002); and Vasile Gogea, *Fragmente salvate (1975–1989)* (Saved fragments: 1975–1989) (Iași: Editura Polirom, 1996), 168–77.

to the voting sections, and the remaining forces tried in vain, two times, to stop the crowd. At 10:30 a.m. the crowd, joined by workers from the tractor factory Tractorul and citizens of Braşov, all in all some 3,000–4,000 people, gathered in the front of the Party headquarters.¹⁸⁶ Meeting no resistance, the protesters entered the building and threw out furniture and equipment, and set them on fire outside the building. A similar scenario was repeated at the People's Council building. Around 12:00 a.m., the special intervention troops (the riot police) entered the central square of Braşov. Simultaneously, fire engines and firefighters entered the square. Around 1:00 p.m. the crowd was dispersed and the protest ceased. During the night of 15 to 16 of November 1987, some 500 protesters – mainly workers – were arrested and interrogated, of which 61 were eventually deported.¹⁸⁷

The analysis of Braşov protest reveals that the spontaneous revolt of the Steagul Roşu workers was caused by deep economic and social problems. The protest was sparked the non-payment of wages, but turned eventually into an anti-Ceauşescu revolt, which was joined by many citizens of Braşov. Moreover, the crowds protested not only against the Party officials, but also against the rule of Ceauşescu. In this respect, the spontaneous, unorganized and violent character of the Braşov protest reveals the enormous dissatisfaction of the Braşov population with the communist regime. Also, the protest sparked by the Steagul Roşu workers spread to the Tractorul enterprise, but not to other large enterprises in the city. At the same time, it was the

¹⁸⁶ Gogea, *Saved fragments: 1975–1989*, 173.

¹⁸⁷ Deletant, *Ceauşescu and the Securitate*, 253. The Association “15 November 1987” of the participants to the revolt confirms the number of 61 workers deported to other regions of the country. See Comisia Prezidenţială pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste din România (Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania), *Raport final* (Final report), eds. Vladimir Tismăneanu, Dorin Dobrinu, and Cristian Vasile (Bucharest: Editura Humanitas, 2007), 709.

same unorganized and violent character of the revolt that hampered the appearance of a much larger protest action, although large categories of the Braşov population were likely to join the protest. The fact that the strikers decided to leave the plant and protest in the front of the Braşov Party headquarters affected workers' capacity to defend themselves against the special intervention troops. For comparison, the Jiu Valley protest of 2–3 August 1977 showed that a round-the-clock, sit-down strike could have been more effective. Moreover, the Jiu Valley miners' proved to be more organized and conducted a non-violent protest, taking care of not damaging property and issuing a list of requests. In the case of the Braşov revolt, the damaging of the mentioned two buildings favored the quick suppression of the revolt, as the authorities could claim that "hooligan elements" disturbed the peaceful atmosphere of the local elections.

The two major protests discussed above were not singular. For instance, prior to the Braşov workers revolt of November 1987, another violent protest was carried out by the miners in the Motru basin in October 1981. Thus, angered by the rationing of bread, miners went on strike on 19 October 1981, marched into the town of Motru where they attacked the building of the Party committee. The assault on the building began at around 3 p.m. on 19 October. The authorities sent the army, Militia and Securitate to suppress the protest: the intervention lasted from 10 p.m. on 19 October until 3 a.m. the next day, i.e. on 20 October 1981. Finally, nine miners were put to trial and received sentences ranging from 6 to 8 years in prison.¹⁸⁸ One should be also reminded that during the period under scrutiny there occurred also numerous small, spontaneous work conflicts, strikes or revolts that had no political goals, and sometimes were not even caused by wage cuts or difficult working conditions. In a majority of the cases, however, the demands put forward by the

¹⁸⁸ Gheorghe Gorun, *Rezistenţa la comunism: Motru '981* (Resistance to communism: Motru 1981) (Cluj: Editura Clusium, 2005), 89–93.

strikers were related to food shortages, heating problems and non-payment of wages. In his diary, writer Stelian Tănase speaks of a strike that broke out in November 1988 at a major Bucharest heavy-industry plant during which the workers asked for *mîncare și căldură*, i.e. food and heating.¹⁸⁹ Actually, as Vladimir Socor has shown, the scenario of a working-class protest was more or less the following:

Representatives of the party and other authorities, including the police, rushed to scene of the strikes, acted in a conciliatory manner by promising full redress of the workers' grievances, and brought into the strike-bound factories ample food-supplies, including items that had not been seen in a long time. Within a few days the concessions induced the strikers to go back to work. No arrests, prosecutions, or physical maltreatment were reported. Following the full-scale resumption of work, however, the police began questioning workers.¹⁹⁰

To sum up, one should note that, until the popular revolt of Timișoara, the strategy described above served well the regime, which contained almost all the protests from below, with the exception of the November 1987 Brașov workers' revolt. One should stress that the protest of the Brașov workers was in many respects similar with the one carried out in June 1956 by the Polish workers in Poznań.¹⁹¹ With respect to the "mechanism" of the revolt, the similarity between the two protests is indeed striking: workers went on strike, marched into the town where they were joined by many city dwellers in their protest and finally attacked and damaged heavily the Party headquarters building. In the Romanian case, the 1987 Brașov workers' revolt showed for the first time ever that a high potential

¹⁸⁹ Tănase, *The Official Wintertime*, 91.

¹⁹⁰ Vladimir Socor, RFE/Situation Report/2, 19.

¹⁹¹ On the 1956 Polish workers' revolt in Poznań, see R. J. Crampton, *Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 1994), 285.

for revolt existed not only among the workers, but also among the urban population in general.

The study of the mechanisms of revolt, however, does not explain why major protests occurred in those areas and only there. To answer such a question, one should engage in a complex analysis involving industrialization and urbanization patterns, long distance intercounty migration trends, and the distribution of developmental resources between different regions of Romania. Concerning the way in which the process of industrialization and urbanization led to the modification of the industrial structure of population, census data indicate that between 1956 and 1977, in the case of Hunedoara County (which includes the Jiu Valley region), in the major mining centers, the employment in the secondary sector was significantly high.¹⁹² Furthermore, in 1977 in the Hunedoara County workers represented 63.2 percent of the total active population. In 1977, the Braşov County turned to be one of the most industrialized counties of Romania, where workers represented 70.5 percent of the total active population and the employment in the secondary sector was high.¹⁹³

At the same time, the analysis of workers' potential of protest has to take into consideration not only the total number of workers employed in the secondary sector, but also the percentage of commuting villagers and the percentage of long distance intercounty migrants. As shown above, it is important to discuss the emergence

¹⁹² In 1977, the population active in the second sector represented 77.7 percent of total active population in Lupeni, 74.3 percent in Petriţa, 66.5 percent in Uricani, and 78.6 percent in Vulcan. In the case of the city of Hunedoara, 71.4 percent of the total active population was employed in the secondary sector.

¹⁹³ The population active in the secondary sector represented 67.2 percent in Braşov, 71.3 percent in Codlea, 71.8 percent in Făgăraş, 77.7 percent in Rîşnov, 77.9 percent in Săcele, 73.7 percent in Victoria and 85.6 percent in Zărneşti. See Table 29, Industrial Structure of Romanian Towns in 1977 – Active Population in Primary (I), Secondary (II) and Tertiary (III) Employment, in Ronnås, *Urbanization in Romania*, 369–73.

of the category of “genuine” workers, obliged to rely almost entirely on the salary obtained from the socialist sector, in relation with the working-class revolts under communist rule. These workers were the most vulnerable in the case of wage cuts in the context of the structural crisis that became evident in the early 1980s. The most affected workers were those who severed their ties with their families – the long distance intercounty migrants – who could not rely on the products of the small family lot or did not have a relative to stay in line for hours in order to buy some basic aliments (milk, butter, sugar, meat, eggs, edible oil, etc.).

The analysis of the long distance intercounty migration is based on the data provided by the 1977 census. Unfortunately, between 1977 and 1992 no other census was taken in order to complete the information with data concerning the period between 1977 and 1989. However, considering the partial information available, it is reasonable to consider that the general trend was maintained.¹⁹⁴ In order to define the concept of long distance intercounty migration, the present research considered a maximum commuting time of two hours per trip, which means a total of four hours per day. As discussed above, this calculation has been made considering the main characteristics of the Romanian means of transport, based on railway and bus schedules from the period; since gasoline was strictly rationed in the 1980s, commuting by personal automobile was almost non-existent. Moreover, the information provided by different scholars has been compared with author’s own experience of commuting.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ In the case of Braşov, the pattern of long distance intercounty migration was also illustrated in the 1980s by the numerous jokes with Moldavians who migrated to Transilvania. A very popular joke stated that the city of Braşov was slowly transforming itself into Iaşov, considering the large number of migrants from the Moldavian city of Iaşi.

¹⁹⁵ In her study on the village of Binţinţi (Hunedoara county), Verdery states that the average commuting time for the commuting villagers was of two hours.

The result is that in the overwhelming majority of the cases the commuting range could not exceed the neighboring counties.

Therefore, in order to determine the percentage of the population unable to commute daily, the population born in the neighboring counties has been subtracted from the total number of migrants into the respective county. The analysis is based on the absolute figures of internal migration for twelve selected counties and the city of Bucharest.¹⁹⁶ One should also mention that the counties selected correspond to the 1981 administrative reform. The selection was made considering the areas where working-class protests occurred in both interwar and communist periods, i.e. the counties of Hunedoara, Braşov, Cluj, Prahova, Iaşi, Constanţa, and Timişoara. At the same time, the analysis was extended to the counties considered sources of internal migration (such as Vaslui, in Moldova) and to those counties considered representative for the respective region of Romania in terms of their development under communist rule (such as: Dolj for Oltenia; Arad for Crişana-Maramureş; and Argeş and Dâmboviţa for Muntenia).¹⁹⁷

In the case of Hunedoara County, the figures related to the migrants coming from the bordering counties – Alba, Arad, Caraş-Severin, Gorj, Timiş and Vâlcea – have been subtracted from the total number of interregional migrants. This resulted in a total number of 131,388 long distance intercounty migrants, representing 25.5 percent of county's total population. In the case of Braşov

Katherine Verdery, *Transylvanian Villagers: Three Centuries of Political, Economic and Ethnic Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 58. See also the discussion on the commuting workforce of the Piteşti Automobile Enterprise.

¹⁹⁶ The calculation is based on the internal migration figures provided by the official 1977 census. See Direcţia Centrală de Statistică, *Republica Socialistă România: Recensământul populaţiei şi al locuinţelor din 5 ianuarie 1977*, vol. I, *Populaţie – Structura demografică* (Bucharest: n.p., 1980), 696–743.

¹⁹⁷ For more details, see Annex 3 to Dragoş Petrescu, "Patterns of Working-Class Protest in Communist Romania," 140.

County, the total number of migrants coming from the bordering counties – Argeş, Buzău, Covasna, Dîmboviţa, Harghita, Mureş, Prahova and Sibiu – has been subtracted from the total number of migrants into the respective country. This resulted in a total number of 146,696 long distance intercounty migrants, representing 25.2 percent of the county's total population. Nevertheless, there were another two counties – Timiş and Constanţa – that received a relatively high number of long distance intercounty migrants (23.5 percent of the total population and 21.8 percent, respectively). Moreover, in both cases, the working class was well represented in absolute numbers as well as in the percentage of the total population. In the case of Timiş County, workers represented 59.1 percent of the total county's population, while in the case of Constanţa County workers made up 64.0 percent of the total population.¹⁹⁸

Furthermore, the investments in the fixed assets of socialist enterprises created a differentiation between the counties. As Daniel Nelson has aptly shown, during the period 1970–1983 some major changes occurred in the regime's economic policy. In terms of investments, the “big winners” were the Constanţa, Gorj, Tulcea and Vâlcea counties, while the “big losers” were the industrialized counties

¹⁹⁸ In the Timiş County, in 1977, the structure of the population involved in the secondary sector, for the major county's towns, was the following (for comparison, the percentage of total active population active in the tertiary sector is given in parentheses): Timişoara, 60.8 percent of the total active population (36.8 percent active in the tertiary sector); Lugoj, 57.7 percent (37.5 percent active in the tertiary sector); Buziaş, 32.5 percent (36.4 percent employed in the tertiary sector); Deta, 54.1 percent (32.1 percent); Jimbolia, 68.0 percent (20.9 percent) and Sînnicolau Mare, 46.5 percent (34.9 percent). In the case of the Constanţa County, the percentages of the population active in the secondary sector, for the major county's towns are indicated below (the percentage of the population involved in the tertiary sector is provided in parentheses): Constanţa, 43.1 percent (54.1 percent); Eforie, 25.8 percent (70.7 percent); Mangalia, 48.1 percent (45.7 percent); Cernavodă, 51.7 percent (39.8 percent); Medgidia, 59.6 percent (32.3 percent). See Ronnås, *Urbanization in Romania*, 369–73.

of Hunedoara and Prahova. Moreover, there were no Transylvanian counties among the “big winners.” The Mureș County, for instance, was a “big loser,” whereas Cluj County was a “moderate loser.” The Brașov County was placed among the “small losers,” while Timiș County experienced almost no change in terms of investments.¹⁹⁹ As for the Hunedoara and Brașov counties, the lack of investments in industry created major sources of workers’ discontent. Such was the case in Jiu Valley, where workers demanded the establishment of light industry factories – to provide jobs for their spouses and daughters, criticized the bad working conditions – such as the lack of protective equipment, and asked for a free meal before entering the shift. In the case of the Steagul Roșu Brașov truck plant, the obsolete products of the enterprise induced the loss of export markets and the non-fulfillment of the export plan, which led to wage cuts and created the premises for the November 1987 revolt.²⁰⁰

It seems that in the cases of Timiș and Constanța counties, the possibility of smuggling consumer goods from the former Yugoslavia and Hungary (in the case of Timiș County) or through the commercial seaport (in the case of the city of Constanța) acted somehow as a “safety valve” and delayed the emergence of social protests in both regions.²⁰¹ One should also note that workers’ protests occurred also in the capital city, Bucharest. However, in Bucharest the situation was different from the rest of the country for two main reasons. First, since Bucharest was the center of power, the concentration of repression forces – army, militia and secret police – was much higher than in the

¹⁹⁹ Daniel Nelson, *Romanian Politics in the Ceaușescu Era* (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1988), 164–66.

²⁰⁰ Deletant, *Ceaușescu and the Securitate*, 252.

²⁰¹ A detailed analysis of smuggling consumer goods in both Timiș and Constanța counties has to be carried out in order to reveal the extent to which the possibility of buying scarce consumer goods on the black market hindered or delayed the emergence of social protests in working-class environments.

rest of the country, and protests were contained easily. Second, conditions of life in Bucharest were a little better than in the province: for instance, bread was not rationed and gasoline quotas were higher.

The analysis of long-distance migration trends reveals an element of paramount importance: by the end of the 1980s there were four regions in Romania in which workers' potential of protest was particularly high, i.e. the counties of Constanța, Brașov, Hunedoara, and Timiș. When the revolution sparked on 16 December 1989 in the city of Timișoara, long distance migrants played an important role in the events. A participant in the events, writer Daniel Vighi, recalls: "There were many Moldavians, very courageous.... Let us be fair and unprejudiced to the Moldavians from here [from Timișoara]... who were in the front rows and got beaten. That is the truth; they fought with the Militia in the Central Park, in the dark."²⁰² As for the participation of the workers in Timișoara to the 1989 revolution, it suffices to say that out of the total number of 376 victims in Timișoara during the period 17 – 21 December, 185 were workers.²⁰³

Thus, an analysis of the way in which working-class unrest contributed to the collapse of the Romanian communism has to consider both the intricate process of co-optation by the regime during the 1960s and 1970s and the deep frustration felt by many industrial workers in the late 1980s. The peasant-workers or the commuting villagers – estimated at 30–50 percent of the total active workforce in industry – were less affected by the economic crisis that lowered Romanians' standard of living beginning in the late 1970s. Such a category was favored by the strategy of the "extended family household" which permitted people, especially during the period of structural crisis and food shortages of 1981–1989, to obtain the necessary foodstuffs for survival. The category of "genuine" workers,

²⁰² Milin, *Timișoara in revolution and after*, 28–29.

²⁰³ Pitulescu, ed., *The Ministry of Internal Affairs in December 1989*, 100.

who were totally dependent on the salary received in industry, developed slowly in communist Romania. As discussed above, the category of "genuine" workers attained a certain degree of self-consciousness in the late 1970s and early 1980s, depending on the characteristics of the workplace (large or small enterprise, dangerous work, location of the enterprise and its relevance at national level). At the same time, such workers had an increased tendency to develop spontaneous and violent forms of protest, since they were forced to think in terms of biological survival.

A thorough analysis of workers' revolts shows that industrial workers from large enterprises were more likely to organize defensive, wage strikes, after long periods of discontent, rather than to engage in offensive, politically motivated strikes that could have led to the development of a mass-movement similar to the Polish Solidarity. Even if the Braşov revolt would have been a round-the-clock, non-violent sit-down strike on the model of Jiu Valley miners' strike of 1977 it is unlikely that solidarity strikes in major enterprises throughout the country would have occurred. Nevertheless, the Braşov workers revolt revealed that the deep economic crisis in the late 1980s created a special sense of cohesion and solidarity among the urban population in general. Furthermore, it indicated that the potential for protest of Romanian urban population was higher in the large cities and that spontaneous violent revolts were likely to be joined by an appreciable number of bystanders. Finally, the analysis of long distance inter-county migration trends shows that in four areas of the country the potential for protest by the industrial workers was particularly high. In four counties, Constanţa, Braşov, Hunedoara and Timiş, long-distance inter-county migrants made up around 25 percent of the total population, of which over 60 percent were workers. Such people severed their ties with countryside and could not rely on their families in a period when "queuing for food" was crucial for feeding one's family. It was in one of these areas, namely the Timiş County, where the 1989 Romanian revolution was sparked.

THE CHURCH, THE MILITARY AND THE SECURITATE
HOW THESE INSTITUTIONS
“THOUGHT” UNDER COMMUNISM

Church and Religion under Communism

Much has been written on the alleged “submissive” character of the Romanians. Some authors have argued that the dominant religious culture – the Greek-Orthodox faith, has a major impact on both the regime and community political cultures, and determined a more compliant attitude toward the communist regime. Much has also been written on the role of Catholic Church in establishing a mass opposition movement under communism, and the most quoted case is that of the Catholic Church in Poland and its role in the birth of Solidarity. For instance, Jacques Rupnik wrote in 1988 that in communist Poland the Church was “the official counter-culture, the repository of an alternative ideology.”²⁰⁴ Similarly, Eisenstadt emphasized the importance of the Catholic Church in Poland in creating “autonomous sectors” under state socialism.²⁰⁵ Compared with the Polish case, it is no wonder that many authors argued that the complacent character of the Romanian Orthodox Church hampered the development of an alternative discourse to that of the ruling power. Shafir, for instance, stated: “The contrast with the Catholic Church in Poland could not be greater. Traditional submission, increased by the treat of sanctions, makes the dominant church in Romania a tool in the hands of the

²⁰⁴ Jacques Rupnik, *The Other Europe* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989), 209–10.

²⁰⁵ S. N. Eisenstadt, “The Breakdown of Communist Regimes,” in *Daedalus* 121 (Spring 1992): 21–41.

authorities.”²⁰⁶ It is this author’s opinion that a discussion on the mechanisms that made the Orthodox Church in Romania more compliant with the communist authorities has to focus on *church* and its institutional needs. A much more complicated discussion is that on the alleged role of *religion*, that is, the Orthodox faith, in inducing a passive attitude towards the regime among a majority of the population.

The present analysis is organized on two parts. The first part consists in a historical survey, focusing on the relationship between the Romanian Orthodox Church (ROC) and the communist state during the period 1945–1989. The second part discusses the role of ROC as a religious organization and its strategy to address its institutional needs; this part also addresses the alleged role of religion in establishing a passive attitude towards the regime in communist Romania. The present section concludes that the ROC, due to its passivity and subservience, contributed little to the collapse of communism in Romania. At the same time, it argues that, somehow paradoxically, the more formalistic and ritualistic character of Orthodoxy led, in the late 1980s, to the development of a silent – but steady – opposition to the regime.

The imposition of communist rule in Romania was accompanied by the enforcement of a strict state control over the Church. As Deletant aptly puts it: “The Romanian Communist Party, while officially condemning religious worship, nevertheless tolerated it within certain bounds prescribed by law. In this respect, it was more lenient than the Soviet regime.”²⁰⁷ The legislative framework was established in 1948, when the communist regime adopted the Law of Cults. Under the Articles 6 and 7, the Law stated that the practice of religion had to observe the Constitution, internal security, public order and general morality. Furthermore, Article 13 introduced the

²⁰⁶ Shafir, *Romania: Politics, Economics and Society*, 152.

²⁰⁷ Deletant, *Ceaușescu and the Securitate*, 10.

provision that the State had the right to revoke the legal recognition of a denomination, when considered justified. In addition, Article 32 stated that the clergymen “who express anti-democratic attitudes may be deprived temporarily or permanently of their salary, which is provided by the state.”²⁰⁸ All in all, the Law proved to be an effective instrument in imposing the authority of the communist regime on the Churches.

After the collapse of the communist regime, a much debated has been that of the collaboration of the upper hierarchy of the ROC with the communist regime. With regard to the early Stalinist period, Czeslaw Milosz addresses the case of Justinian Marina (1901–1977), the Patriarch of ROC, who allegedly proclaimed: “Christ is a new man. The new man is the Soviet man. Therefore Christ is a Soviet man!”²⁰⁹ Patriarch Justinian’s statement, if true, best characterizes the ambiguous relationship between ROC and the communist regime in the aftermath of the communist take-over. Justinian, who became Patriarch in 1948, had a close relationship with Gheorghiu-Dej. It was said that after evading from the Tîrgu-Jiu prison camp, in the second week of August 1944, few days before the coup d’état of 23 August 1944, Gheorghiu-Dej was hid by Justinian, a humble village priest at the time. In one of Gheorghiu-Dej’s official biographies, the paragraph related to his escape reads as follows: “Thus, after 11 years of imprisonment, in one of the nights at the end of the first half of August [1944], comrade Gheorghe Gheorghiu-De evades from the Tîrgu-Jiu prison camp.”²¹⁰ Ion Gheorghe Maurer, who organized the escape, recalls that the event took place two or three weeks before 23 August 1944.²¹¹ Official information on Gheorghiu-Dej’s escape was

²⁰⁸ Quoted in Deletant, *Ceaușescu and the Securitate*, 10.

²⁰⁹ Czeslaw Milosz, *The Captive Mind* (London: Penguin Books, 1985), 208.

²¹⁰ Gh. Gheorghiu-Dej (Bucharest: Editura Partidului Muncitoresc Român, 1951), 42.

²¹¹ For Maurer’s statement, see Betea, *Maurer and the Yesterday World*, 48.

provided in an article published in the Party's daily newspaper *Scînteia* on 24 August 1946. The author, Ștefan Voicu, maintains that Gheorghiu-Dej evaded from the Tîrgu-Jiu prison camp two weeks before the coup of 23 August 1944.²¹² In any case, Maurer recalls that after the escape a village priest hid Gheorghiu-Dej and himself some 30 kilometers east of Craiova, but did not identify that Orthodox priest as the future Patriarch Justinian. In spite of these ambiguities, the close relationship between Gheorghiu-Dej and Patriarch Justinian is confirmed by witness accounts. For instance, Paul Sfetcu, Gheorghiu-Dej's secretary for thirteen years, recalls that the supreme leader of RWP knew Justinian from the period of illegality. Sfetcu also recalls an episode related to the construction works carried out to the new Congress Hall (*Sala Palatului*) in Bucharest. The Krețulescu (Orthodox) Church was initially believed to obstruct the project and therefore Gheorghiu-Dej asked, during a conversation over the phone, for Justinian permission to demolish the church. Patriarch Justinian, Sfetcu remembers, gave on the spot his consent to the demolition, but the project was carried out without demolishing that particular church.²¹³

Patriarch Justinian died in 1977, after twenty-nine years in office and left an ambiguous legacy. Some said that he succeeded to reconcile the obligation of the Orthodox Church to serve the regime with its transcendental mission. Until his death in 1977, Justinian managed to ensure the survival of the Orthodox Church during the period of Stalinist terror of the early 1950s – when atheism was widely propagated – and to maintain the continuity of monastic life. However, his role in the suppression of the Uniate (Greek-Catholic) Church and its subsequent absorption into ROC in 1948 is still to be discussed. Furthermore, in spite of its compromise with the State, ROC could not

²¹² *Scînteia*, no. 608 (24 August 1946). Quoted in Betea, *Maurer and the Yesterday World*, 51.

²¹³ Sfetcu, *Thirteen Years in Dej's Antechamber*, 74–76.

avoid the consequences of the second period of terror launched by Gheorghiu-Dej's regime, which followed the 1958 withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Romania. According to some authors, between 1958 and 1963 the regime arrested around 2,500 priests, monks and nuns, and closed more than half of the monasteries existing in the country.²¹⁴

During the period 1977–1989, the ROC played a most controversial role that deserves further examination. As already mentioned, Patriarch Justinian died in 1977 and was succeeded by Justin Moisescu (1977–1986). Although Patriarch Justinian was accused of being a “red priest,” some said that Patriarch Justin was even closer to the communist power than his predecessor.²¹⁵ In 1986, Teoctist Arăpașu succeeded Patriarch Justin and followed a similar line of compliance with the communist regime. After the collapse of the communist regime, in January 1990, Patriarch Teoctist, who was fiercely denounced for his collaboration with the Ceaușescu regime, resigned. Two months after, in spite of the protests coming from different sectors of the Romanian society, he was reinstated as the Patriarch of the ROC.

The period between 1977 and 1989 was characterized by the most troublesome compromises between the Orthodox Church and the regime. During the period 1977–1989, the role of ROC as a social institution was neglected and its duty as spiritual body was compromised. Apart from the quiescence of the ROC hierarchy with regard to the human rights abuses of the Ceaușescu regime, one of the most debated issues is that of the almost complete lack of protest from the part of the Orthodox clergy against the demolition of numerous churches in Bucharest. One should be reminded that, between 1984 and 1989, because of Ceaușescu's plan of systemization of Romania's capital city, as many as eighteen Orthodox churches were razed to the ground. As historian Dinu C. Giurescu remembers,

²¹⁴ Deletant, *Ceaușescu and the Securitate*, 216.

²¹⁵ Shafir, *Romania: Politics, Economics and Society*, 151.

in December 1985 Patriarch Justin argued that the regime destroyed only some small, insignificant churches and this could not be interpreted as a manifestation of regime's hostility towards the Church.²¹⁶ If the head of the ROC had such an image of the ongoing demolition of Orthodox churches in Bucharest, it is no wonder then that the small clergy was equally silent. Writer Stelian Tănase recalls that in 1988 he asked a Bucharest parish priest about Romanian Patriarchy's stance toward to the destruction of churches. The answer he received was perplexing: the demolition of churches did not depend on the Romanian Patriarchy's approval and after all the people, not the Patriarchy, had to protest since churches belong to the people and not to the Patriarchy.²¹⁷ Patriarch Teoctist, who succeeded Patriarch Justin in 1986, followed the same line of compliance with the regime. As Deletant rightly puts it, Teoctist's telegram of support for the Ceaușescu regime – published on 20 December 1989, when the population of Timișoara was already protesting for three days against the regime – proved that the hierarchy of the ROC was overtly supporting the regime.²¹⁸

As stated in the beginning of this section, in discussing such intricate issues as the subservience of ROC under communism or the influence of Orthodox faith on Romanians' alleged passive, non-rebellious character one should make the distinction between *church* and *religion*. Churches, in general, strive to adopt policies that correspond to their institutional needs. In this respect, Pedro Ramet identifies four factors that determine the institutional needs of a religious organization: (1) size; (2) dispersion; (3) symbolic resources; and (4) operational ideology.²¹⁹ An analysis based on the application

²¹⁶ Quoted in Dinu C. Giurescu, *Distrugerea trecutului României* (The Razing of Romania's Past) (Bucharest: Editura Museion, 1994), 87.

²¹⁷ Tănase, *The Official Wintertime*, 105.

²¹⁸ Deletant, *Ceaușescu and the Securitate*, 233–34.

²¹⁹ Pedro Ramet, *Cross and Commissar: The Politics of Religion in Eastern Europe and the USSR* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 193.

of the above-mentioned four factors in the case of ROC contributes to a better understanding of the local context and the way in which the hierarchy of the ROC was forced to accommodate with the regime. At the same time, such an analysis reveals the limitations of the unwritten pact of “peaceful coexistence” between the regime and ROC.

The first element that influences the relationship between a religious organization and the secular authority is its *size*: the larger the religious organization, the greatest its need to come to terms with the secular authority. In this respect, ROC was, and still is, the largest denomination in the country with a number of worshipers ranging between 15,5 and 16 million in a population of 23 million.²²⁰ Therefore, because of its size the ROC was compelled to devise a strategy to accommodate to the policies of the communist regime. Similarly, in the case of Poland, some authors argue, the size of the Catholic Church determined the ambiguous attitude of its upper hierarchy towards the regime until the mid-1970s. Andrzej Korbonski, for instance, notices that “from the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s, the policy of the [Polish Catholic] Church was focused primarily on safeguarding its own position vis-à-vis the government.” In Korbonski’s opinion, the involvement of the Catholic Church in political dissent after 1976 was due to the increased political activism among the younger clergy.²²¹

A second element in the analysis of the needs of a religious organization is its *dispersion*: the greater the interaction of the religious organization with external organizations, the greater its ability to escape regime’s capacity of controlling it. The most obvious case is that of Catholics, but also, to some extent, of the Muslims or the

²²⁰ V. C. Chrypinski, “Romania” in Stuart Mews, ed., *Religion in Politics: A World Guide* (Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1989), 228. See also Shafir, *Romania: Politics, Economics and Society*, 151.

²²¹ Andrzej Korbonski, “Dissent in Poland, 1956–1976,” in Jane Leftwich Curry, ed., *Dissent in Eastern Europe* (New York: Praeger, 1983), 32.

neo-Protestants in Eastern Europe. Therefore, as far as the dispersion factor is concerned, the autocephalous Orthodox Church was more vulnerable to pressure by the communist regime in comparison with the Catholic Church. In the case of the Polish Catholic Church, for instance, its affiliation with an external ecclesiastical center, i.e. the Vatican, led to increasing difficulties for the regime to control its activity.²²² Furthermore, one should not forget that an external conjunctural factor, i.e. the unexpected election of Cardinal Karol Wojtyła of Poland as the first non-Italian pope since 1522, contributed immensely to the consolidation of the authority of the Polish Catholic Church.

The *symbolic resources* of a religious organization contribute to its capacity to resist in face of an authoritarian regime, if that organization decides to do so. Moreover, when an organized religion decides to confront the secular authorities, an increase in the symbolic resources of the respective denomination usually leads to an increase in its defiance towards the regime. Therefore, the election of Cardinal Wojtyła to the papacy in 1978 – he assumed the papal throne as John Paul II, as well as the tragic fate of the pro-Solidarity priest Jerzy Popiełuszko – who was assassinated by the Polish secret police in 1984, increased tremendously the symbolic resources of the Polish Catholic Church. In the case of the ROC, its symbolic capital was subject to continuous erosion during the communist period in spite of the fact that, traditionally, ROC was perceived at both elite and community levels as a repository of the most profound “national” values.

Nevertheless, due to its size, dispersion and operational ideology ROC was forced to become subservient to the communist regime. Such an institutional strategy ensured the survival of the ROC during the years of Stalinist terror, but its subservient attitude towards the powers that be during the 1980s did not contribute to preserving, not to speak of increasing, its symbolic capital. Again, the most

²²² Ramet, *Cross and Commissar*, 193–94.

difficult thing is to explain Orthodox Church's attitude towards the demolition of churches in Bucharest. As mentioned above, there were actually no protests from the top of Church's hierarchy during the 1980s, when eighteen churches were demolished in Bucharest as part of Ceaușescu's systematization plan. Apart from Father Gheorghe Calciu, who protested against the demolitions in a series of sermons delivered at the Radu Vodă Church in Bucharest, few other clergymen protested against regime's policy towards the ROC.²²³ In fact, during the 1980s, ROC did not engage in any action that could hamper the erosion of its symbolic resources. This led not so much to a decrease in ROC's capacity to resist the involvement of the regime in its affairs, a situation that ROC could not avoid anyway, but to a profound alienation of many believers of Orthodox faith.

Finally, another element of major importance for the present analysis is the *operational ideology* of a given religious organization. In terms of operational ideology, the Orthodox Church, similar to other traditional denominations, is less oriented towards proselytization. As a consequence, during the 1980s, in the conditions of deep economic crisis and increased moral, as well as spiritual, confusion, the neo-Protestant cults (especially the Baptists) – whose operational ideology focuses on proselytization – experienced a rapid growth in numbers. According to a 1986 estimate, there were approximately 200,000 Baptists, 200,000 Pentecostals and 45,000 Plymouth Brethren in Romania. For all these neo-Protestant denominations, the estimated growth rate was about 20,000 new converts a year, with most converts coming from the Orthodox Church.²²⁴

²²³ Father Calciu (b. 1927) was arrested on 10 May 1979 and sentenced to ten years in prison. Due to international pressures, he was released from prison in 1984 and immigrated to the United States in 1985. Deletant, *Ceaușescu and the Securitate*, 231–32. For Father Calciu's sermons see Preot Gheorghe Calciu, *Șapte cuvinte către tineri* (Seven words to the young people) (Bucharest: Editura Anastasia, 1996), 21–80.

²²⁴ Ramet, *Cross and Commissar*, 160–61.

To sum up, due to its significant size, ROC was compelled to devise a strategy of survival under the communist regime. Since ROC is autocephalous, that is, does not depend on an external center of ecclesiastical power, its very existence depends on the Romanian state. Such a situation led, during the communist years, to a close collaboration between ROC and the communist regime, which in the first instance permitted the survival of the ROC during the years of terror that accompanied the communist takeover. At the same time, in the conditions of the profound economic, social and moral crisis of the 1980s, the collaboration of the ROC with the communist regime led to a rapid erosion of its symbolic capital and to an increased alienation of numerous Orthodox believers. Since the operational ideology of the ROC is not oriented towards proselytization, neo-protestant denominations spread rapidly during the 1980s. Many of the new converts, the available statistics suggest, were mostly former believers of Orthodox faith. Many of those who left ROC did this in their quest for spiritual guidance, others because membership in such denominations proved to ease the immigration to the United States. Nevertheless, the sad conclusion is that ROC and its hierarchy contributed little to the final demise of the Romanian communism.

A comprehensive discussion on the alleged influence of the Orthodox faith on the submissive character of the Orthodox believers, which has to concentrate on *religion*, would go much beyond the scope of this chapter. It should be mentioned, however, that many Western authors have pointed out, often shallowly, to the Orthodox faith as being responsible for the lack of public protest against the Ceaușescu regime. True, the Orthodox Church often preached submission to the secular authority. At the same time, one should not neglect the profound transformations the Romanian society underwent under communism. Until the early 1980s, as shown above, the regime had something to offer to the Romanian society at large: a modest improvement of the living standards. Religion, as Trond Gilberg puts it, “teaches the rules of interaction among individuals and the collectivities they form and ultimately establishes

behavior towards authority, both secular and spiritual.”²²⁵ Consequently, as long as large segments of the Romanian society still credited the regime for the post-1964 social and economic achievements, ROC’s strategy to accommodate with the regime was not perceived as wrong or immoral.

Things, however, changed drastically in the conditions of the deep crisis of the 1980s. Due to electric power shortages and erratic raw materials supply, numerous state enterprises had to work on Sundays or traditional feasts. This also alienated a majority of the workers, of which, many were in fact commuting villagers sticking to the tradition. As a consequence, a syndrome, identified by Verdery as “etatization of time,” affected large segments of Romania’s population. “Etatization of time” refers to the “ways in which the Romanian State seized time by compelling people’s bodies into particular activities.”²²⁶ Verdery’s argument is important for the present analysis especially because it is related to the formalistic and ritualistic character of Orthodoxy. Simply put, “etatization of time” contributed, somehow obliquely, to the final demise of the regime. Traditional Orthodoxy, Verdery argues, is characterized by rhythms of worship and by the observance of saints’ days. By striving to create the new “socialist” man, however, the communist state altered the traditional religious rhythms. “In contrast with the religious rhythms just mentioned – Verdery states – the identity of the new socialist man was to be marked by non-observance of a fixed holy day, his day(s) of leisure distributed at random across the week.”²²⁷ Thus, work on Sundays – which also affected Easter, on Orthodox saints’ days or on Christmas day was largely opposed by workers, peasant-

²²⁵ Trond Gilberg, *Nationalism and Communism in Romania: The Rise and Fall of Ceausescu’s Personal Dictatorship* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990), 3.

²²⁶ Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 40.

²²⁷ Verdery, *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* 53–54.

workers and peasants alike. Very often, and especially among peasants and peasant-workers, the main argument was that work performed on such days would bring misfortune and calamities.²²⁸

It was an additional element that originated in the 1980s, which, as far as the Orthodox faith is concerned, contributed to the final demise of the Romanian communism. As part of Ceaușescu's systematization plan, many Orthodox churches were torn down in Bucharest. For many believers, this was a sign of Ceaușescu's insanity. However, the lack of protest from the part of the ROC against the demolition, as well as against the relocation of major churches – which were moved from their central and highly symbolic locations to insignificant positions behind high-rise blocks of flats – angered a majority of the Orthodox believers. Furthermore, of the eighteen churches razed to the ground in Bucharest, many were much more than small parish churches. Due to the more formalistic and ritualistic character of the Orthodoxy, churches are seen as repositories of faith and identity and therefore they are key elements in preserving the memory of the nation. A witness account that speaks of the 1987 demolition of the Sfânta Vineri Church – a major church in downtown Bucharest – is telling in this respect:

The place was filled with people, the way I haven't seen either before or after, on any occasion.... It was a silent crowd, nobody talked, nobody moved, but people kept coming, appearing as if from thin air.... There were lots of people with candles in their hand; they must have brought them from home. They were whispering that a soldiers' unit had been brought, but they refused to pull down and shoot when they had been ordered to take the firing position, because the parish priest holding the Cross in his hand had come out in front of the church with some students from the faculty of Theology.²²⁹

²²⁸ Ibid., 54.

²²⁹ Martor, 51–52. For more on the importance of the Sf. Vineri Church as a historic monument (it was built in 1644–1645 and rebuilt in 1839) see Gheorghe Leahu, *Bucureștiul dispărut* (Vanished Bucharest) (Bucharest: Editura Arta Grafică, 1995), 85.

Since ritual is a key element of Orthodoxy, destruction of churches was perceived by a large majority of the population as an attack on the Orthodox faith itself. At that point, the submissive attitude of the Orthodox Church towards the regime alienated a large majority of the Orthodox believers who kept their faith but felt betrayed by the ROC, which was seen as a tool in the hands of the regime. The silent majority of the Orthodox believers, often sticking uncritically to the ritual and paying sometimes more attention to the feasts traditionally associated with religious celebrations than to the main tenets of the Orthodox faith, developed a quiet and anti-political form of opposition to the regime. Such a quiet, but nonetheless powerful, form of opposition contributed massively to the emergence of the short-lived sentiment of solidarity among the revolted masses in December 1989 that determined the collapse of the communist regime in Romania.

The Military under the Ceaușescu Regime

Systematically, the post-1989 opinion polls have indicated that Romania's population has confidence in two institutions: the Church and the Army. While the Romanian Orthodox Church was criticized for its subservience to the RCP, the army was blamed for the way in which it carried out the repression of the revolutionaries in Timișoara (17/18 December) and Bucharest (21/22 December). At the same time, a majority of the authors who focused on the 1989 Revolution in Romania agree that the moment when the army fraternized with the revolutionary was a key, perhaps *the* key, moment of the revolution. On 22 December 1989, the withdrawal of the army from the Palace Square in Bucharest signaled that the Ceaușescu regime was over. Consequently, this section addresses the issue of the

relationship between the RCP and the army in order to provide an explanation for the way in which this particular institution and its leadership reacted to the events of December 1989. Nevertheless, a brief historical overview of the organization and activity of the military under the communist rule would help one understand better how this institution “thought” during the 1989 revolution and especially during the period 16–22 December 1989. The events unfolded rapidly from the moment when protests sparked in the city of Timișoara on 16 December to the moment when Ceaușescu’s helicopter left the upper platform of the CC building, at 1208 hours on 22 December 1989. The actors – soldiers and officers alike – changed their behavior over a short time span. As already noted, the violent nature of the 1989 revolution has to do with the main features of the regime political culture, i.e. monolithism and emancipation. Thus, the army was ordered to shoot to kill and the confusion, misinformation and indoctrination that characterized the military in general made them obey the order. Consequently, during the period 16–22 December 1989 protesters were arrested, injured and many of them killed. It is the purpose of this chapter to explain, at least partially, why.

Romania

A “dissident voice” within the Warsaw Treaty Organization?

Romania was a founding member of the Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO), the communist military alliance established on 14 May 1955.²³⁰ Three years later, the Soviets decided to withdraw their troops stationed in Romania. The event was truly important, since

²³⁰ For the complete text of the treaty see Constantin Olteanu, *România – O voce distinctă în Tratatul de la Varșovia: Memorii, 1980–1985* (Romania – A distinct voice within the Warsaw Treaty Organization: Memoirs, 1980–1985 (Bucharest: Editura Aldo, 1999), 225–27.

it opened the way towards the “national line” of the Romanian communists, a fact fully acknowledged at the time by Gheorghiu-Dej and his men. Consequently, they saluted the event with humble and reassuring speeches. The Presidium of the Romanian Grand National Assembly issued a decree by which numerous Soviet officers were awarded Romanian decorations. Moreover, the entire effective of the Soviet troops stationed in Romania was awarded the “Liberation from the Fascist Yoke” medal. Throughout the country, official banquets celebrated the Romanian – Soviet friendship while crowds were summoned to the railway stations to present flowers and greet the departing Soviet troops.²³¹ The population was content to see the departure of the Soviets. The RWP leadership, however, had all the reasons to be happy: the withdrawal of the Soviet troops certified the victory of Gheorghiu-Dej’s anti-de-Stalinization strategy.²³² The inner circle of power established in interwar Romania’s prisons, led by Gheorghiu-Dej himself, had managed to stay in power in spite of Khrushchev’s de-Stalinization campaign. The withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Romania in July 1958 was also reflected by the changes that occurred within the military profession. The “national line” of the RCP led to a de-Sovietization

²³¹ Ioan Scurtu, “Introductory Study” to idem, *România: Retragera trupelor sovietice, 1958* (Romania: The withdrawal of the Soviet troops, 1958) (Bucharest: Editura didactică și pedagogică, 1996), 49.

²³² See *Scrisoarea lui N. S. Hrușciiov, prim-secretar al C.C. al P.C.U.S., adresată C.C. al P.M.R. cu privire la retragera trupelor sovietice de pe teritoriul României, 17 aprilie 1958* (Letter of N. S. Khrushchev, First-Secretary of the CC of the CPSU, addressed to the CC of the RWP concerning the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Romania’s territory, 17 April 1958) and *Scrisoarea de răspuns a lui Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, prim-secretar al C.C. al P.M.R. adresată C.C. al P.C.U.S., prin care se exprimă adeziunea la propunerea Uniunii Sovietice de a-și retrage trupele din România* (Letter of reply of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, First-Secretary of the CC of the RWP, addressed to the CC of the CPSU, by which is expressed adhesion to the Soviet Union’s proposal to withdraw its troops from Romania), in Ioan Scurtu, ed., *The withdrawal of the Soviet troops, 1958*, 273–74 and 274–75 respectively.

of the army, which was called to support the independent path chosen by communist Romania. It is interesting that in his memoirs Khrushchev blames Maurer for Romania's change of attitude towards the Soviet Union:

After Gheorghiu-Dej's death [March 1965] we preserved the outward appearance of the same comradely politeness in our relations, but it began to feel artificial. I think Comrade Maurer was to blame for that. Romania wanted to have autonomy for its armed forces. It wanted to be independent from the other Warsaw Pact countries. We realized this for the first time when Romania refused to buy arms from Czechoslovakia in accordance with the pact's procurement plans.²³³

Nevertheless, it was only after the Soviet-led WTO intervention in Czechoslovakia, during the night of 20/21 August 1968, that Romania changed significantly its attitude towards the WTO. According to military historians, it was Ceaușescu's coming to power that consolidated the military potential of Romania. The following measures taken by the Ceaușescu regime are seen as particularly important: (1) the adoption of a new military doctrine based on the principle of defending the country through the participation of the entire population: the entire people's war; (2) the creation of the Patriotic Guards to serve such a doctrine; (3) the revitalization of the national military industry; and (4) the gradual detachment from WTO's plans of "military integration."²³⁴

Ceaușescu capitalized enormously from the August 1968 "balcony scene:" it was Ceaușescu's "charismatic moment" and the army reacted similarly to the rest of the population by supporting the supreme leader of the RCP. In the aftermath of the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia, Romania's relations with the WTO changed.

²³³ Nikita Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers: The Glasnost Tapes* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1990), 112–13.

²³⁴ Codrescu, ed., *The Romanian army in the 1989 Revolution*, 36.

Although it continued to be part of the WTO, beginning in 1968 Romania put an end to its participation with troops to the military maneuvers organized on the territory of other WTO member states. At the same time, beginning in the same year 1968 Romania ceased to organize on its territory military maneuvers that incurred the presence of WTO troops. In addition, from 1968 onwards Romania denied the WTO troops and aircraft the transit of its territory and, respectively, airspace.²³⁵ Nevertheless, Constantin Olteanu, a former Minister of National Defense under Ceaușescu (March 1980 – December 1985) and a staunch supporter of RCP's independent line, has criticized the fact that Romania was not allowed to take part in the WTO joint military exercises. In Olteanu's opinion, such exercises would have contributed to a better preparation of the Romanian army, which was in his opinion denied the opportunity to take part in complex maneuvers.²³⁶

Ceaușescu's independent policies also envisaged an increasingly independent stance towards the Soviet Union in terms of acquisition of military equipment. (A similar policy determined the acquisition of the Canadian CANDU-type nuclear power plant instead of a Soviet model.) Consequently, sustained efforts were made to produce in Romania a large part of the necessary military equipment. Such a decision, however, incurred huge costs: new research institutes were established and the specialized enterprises were enlarged and equipped with relative updated machinery. A post-1989 evaluation indicates that the infantry equipment was overwhelmingly produced in Romania. This kind of equipment included: handguns, sub-machineguns, machineguns, semi-automatic rifles and the respective ammunition. As for artillery, there were produced cannons and field guns (caliber 76 to 152 mm), launchers of unguided missiles with 21 and 40 tubes, antitank

²³⁵ Olteanu, *Romania: A distinct voice within the Warsaw Treaty Organization*, 36.

²³⁶ Ibid.

missiles, as well certain types of anti-aircraft weapons: machineguns, pieces of artillery, and missiles.²³⁷

A major problem was to supply the army with the necessary means of transport, that is, light vehicles and trucks, as well as armored transporters and tanks. General Tiberiu Urdăreanu argues that a first phase in the modernization of the Romanian army was initiated in 1953. At the time, however, the military equipment was overwhelmingly imported from the USSR. Slowly, the domestic production of automobiles and trucks that could be used by the military was started. The production of a light four-wheel drive vehicle – the IMS 57 – began in the small town of Cîmpulung Muscel. The first 4 tons domestically produced truck – the SR 101 – left the production line at the Steagul Roșu (Red Flag) truck factory in Brașov. Nevertheless, Urdăreanu argues, the lack of all-wheel drive trucks seriously hampered the proper development of the army transport units.²³⁸ After 1968, a relative competitive amphibious armored transporter, available in three versions, was fabricated at the Moreni mechanical enterprise but the project took 10–12 years to develop.²³⁹ In addition, light vehicles and heavy trucks, as well as two types of tractors on continuous chain treads for military use were eventually produced. Sustained efforts were made to design and produce a Romanian tank able to replace the outdated Soviet tank T-34 the Romanian army was equipped with. In this respect, until 1989 a medium-size tank, TR-100, was produced and a functional model of a more advanced version, TR-125, was devised.²⁴⁰ Communist Romania also produced military helicopters under a French license and a project to build a military subsonic fighter,

²³⁷ Olteanu, *Romania: A distinct voice within the Warsaw Treaty Organization*, 46.

²³⁸ Tiberiu Urdăreanu, *1989 – Martor și participant* (1989 – Witness and participant) (Bucharest: Editura Militară, 1996), 20.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Olteanu, *Romania: A distinct voice within the Warsaw Treaty Organization*, 46.

IAR-93, in collaboration with Yugoslavia was well under way in 1989.²⁴¹ More complex pieces of equipment such as ships, radiolocation instruments, as well as certain types of helicopters and aircraft (fighters and bombers), were imported from the USSR.

Although Romania produced a wide range of military equipment, the reliability of that equipment was seriously questionable. Obviously, Romania did not possess the economic means to support the domestic production of such a variety of weapons. The task of developing new types of weapons became even more strenuous during the 1980s. During the interval 1982–1989, the budget share allotted to defense was reduced from 4.92 percent to 2.77 percent, which in terms of the share of the GDP dedicated to defense meant a reduction from 1.79 percent in 1982 to 1.23 percent in 1989.²⁴² Furthermore, the structure of the imports of components and spare parts was restrictive: 98 percent of the imports had to be contracted with communist countries and only 2 percent of the imports were allowed to be made from the West.²⁴³

Nevertheless, it was not the unreliable, domestically produced equipment and the lack of complex maneuvers, jointly organized with the WTO member states that frustrated deeply the military

²⁴¹ Romania produced a light helicopter IAR-316-B (Alouette III) and a medium-size helicopter IAR-330 Puma (adaptable to military purposes) whose fabrication was initiated in 1975. As for the IAR-93 project, in 1972 it was established the Craiova Aircraft Enterprise as part of the Yugoslav-Romanian YUROM joint project. The first test flight of an IAR-93 fighter equipped with a Viper-632-41 engine took place on 31 October 1974. After 1989, the YUROM project was abandoned. For more on the development of the Romanian aviation industry after 1968 see Nicolae Balotescu et al., *Istoria aviației române* (History of Romanian aviation) (Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1984), 407–65.

²⁴² Codrescu, ed., *The Romanian army in the 1989 Revolution*, 38.

²⁴³ Urdăreanu, *1989 – Witness and participant*, 22.

during the 1980s. True, such issues contributed to the general sentiment of frustration. Nevertheless, the causes were much deeper: from 1980 on the army entered a process of de-professionalization incurred by the growing involvement of the troops in the economic activities. Traditionally, the army was used as a source of cheap workforce under the communist rule in Romania. For instance, military transport units worked at the “V. I. Lenin” – Bicăz hydroelectric power plant beginning in 1957. Furthermore, work in agriculture was a constant obligation of the army. During the 1986–1990 Five-Year Plan, out of the total irrigation works, the share of the army amounted to 1.5 million hectares. Nevertheless, during the 1980s, the army was increasingly involved on the gigantic worksites imagined by Ceaușescu: the Danube – Black Sea Canal and the systematization of the capital city Bucharest. For instance, at the Danube – Black Sea Canal, the transport units of the army hauled around 140,000,000 tons of excavated soil and construction materials, that is, about 18,000,000 tons per year. In terms of personnel, during the period 1986–1989, an average of 100,000 troops were involved in construction works only, apart from those involved in agriculture.²⁴⁴ Another gigantic worksite was the so-called House of the People in Bucharest, one of Ceaușescu’s follies.²⁴⁵ A participant to the construction works, the then lieutenant Ioan Popa, succeeded in recreating the atmosphere of the gigantic worksite that was the House of the People in the 1980s in a splendid post-

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 24, 26.

²⁴⁵ Architect Camil Roguski (b. 1925), the former director of the specialized design and construction unit whose mission was to decorate Ceaușescu’s palaces, affirms that there were architects Cezar Lăzărescu and Anca Petrescu who had the idea to propose the project of a huge building to serve as a Palace of the Republic. Ceaușescu liked the idea and developed it. For Roguski’s opinion, see Mirela Petcu and Camil Roguski, *Ceaușescu: Adevăruri din umbră – Convorbiri* (Ceaușescu: Hidden truths – Conversations) (Bucharest: Editura Evenimentul Românesc, 2001), 169–71.

1989 novel.²⁴⁶ The House of the People became one of the most cherished dreams of the supreme leader of the RCP. The worksite was visited on an almost daily basis and the pace imposed for the construction work was unbearable. Working under such a pressure was difficult to bear and many soldiers and officers were involved in accidents at work. As Popa recalls, some of his fellows died in terrible accidents or, unable to support the psychological pressure at work, committed suicide.²⁴⁷ The army's rapidly growing involvement in economic activities during the 1980s had serious implications with regard to the level of training of the military. Therefore, de-professionalization and the declining prestige of the military profession were important sources of frustration, especially among the young officers. At the same time, the deep economic crisis generated by Ceaușescu's mistaken economic policies affected also the military.

In the conditions of an acute economic crisis and a growing frustration of the army officers with the regime, two high rank officers – generals Ion Ioniță and Nicolae Militaru – planned in October 1984 a military coup against the Ceaușescu regime. Again, the information on the dissident nucleus within the military and their conspiracy to overthrow Ceaușescu is scarce and contradictory. Nevertheless, some declarations by Ion Iliescu, Silviu Brucan, and General Nicolae Militaru shed some light on the issue. According to Brucan, a first dissident nucleus emerged within the army around generals Ion Ioniță (Minister of National Defense between 1966 and

²⁴⁶ Popa's book is remarkable for the way in which it reconstructs the atmosphere around the House of the People and describes the inhuman pace of the construction works. Also, the accurate analysis of the relationships between the officers and their soldiers, as well as the description of the humiliation and the deep frustration felt by the young army officers, are worth mentioning. See Ioan Popa, *Robi pe Uranus* (Slaves on Uranus) (Bucharest: Editura Humanitas, 1992).

²⁴⁷ Popa, *Slaves on Uranus*, 10.

1976), Nicolae Militaru and Ștefan Kostyal. General Militaru declared that a first plan to overthrow Ceaușescu was devised in the mid-1970s by generals Ion Ioniță and Ion Gheorghe.²⁴⁸ However, Militaru argues, the conditions were not proper for a coup initiated by the army because the societal response to such a coup was difficult to estimate. In other words, the conspirators were not sure if the population would revolt against the regime.

In the 1980s, the situation was totally different. The economic crisis affected large segments of the population: people suffered from cold and electric power cuts, while foodstuffs were increasingly difficult to find on the market. In such conditions, a military coup against Ceaușescu had more chances of being supported by the population. Some details on the scenario of the military coup planned for October 1984 were published in a collective work.²⁴⁹ According to the mentioned source, generals Ioniță and Militaru planned to topple the regime during Ceaușescu's official visit to the Federal Republic of Germany.²⁵⁰ The conspirators planned to arrest first Ceaușescu's closest collaborators, i.e. Emil Bobu, Ion Dincă, Tudor Postelnicu, Ion Coman and Ilie Ceaușescu. According to the plan, the next step was to capture the national radio and television with the support of the military commanders of the Bucharest Military Garrison and launch an appeal to the population to revolt against the rule of Ceaușescu. A division of mechanized infantry, led by the general Dumitru Pletos, and an armored division, led by the general Paul Keller, were supposed to provide support for the new regime. In addition, the conspirators would have been given access to an ammunition depot in the city of

²⁴⁸ Quoted in Perva and Roman, *The mysteries of the Romanian revolution*, 93.

²⁴⁹ Dinu C. Giurescu, ed., *Romania's history in data*, 715–16.

²⁵⁰ Ceaușescu's official visit to the FRG took place on 15–17 October 1984; he was received by President Richard von Weizsacker and Chancellor Helmut Kohl. See Cristina Păiușan, Narcis Dorin Ion, and Mihai Retegan, *Regimul comunist din România: O cronologie politică, 1945–1989* (The communist regime in Romania: A political chronology, 1945–1989) (Bucharest: Editura Tritonic, 2002), 303.

Tîrgoviște guarded by the troops of lieutenant-colonel Ion Suceavă. The plot, however, was discovered due the betrayal of two generals who knew about a part of the plan. As for the conspirators, they did not share the same fate. General Ioniță died suspiciously of cancer three years after (1987). General Kostyal was arrested and forcibly moved to the small city of Curtea de Argeș. General Militaru was also marginalized. Ion Iliescu has confirmed that a dissident nucleus existed within the military. Iliescu conceded that he held some secret meetings with members of that group and mentioned the names of the generals Ioniță and Militaru, as well as the name of Virgil Măgureanu. At the same time, Iliescu has argued that Militaru's plan to overthrow the regime during Ceaușescu's absence from Romania seemed unrealistic to him.²⁵¹ After 1989, both Militaru and Măgureanu held important positions in the state apparatus: Militaru as Minister of Defense and Măgureanu as head of the Romanian Intelligence Service.²⁵² To conclude, this episode of dissent, although did not bear fruit in the sense of overthrowing or at least weakening the regime, showed that frustration with the Ceaușescu regime was growing within the military.

The army and the Revolution

From repression to switch of arms

The year 1989 contributed even more to the growing frustration within the military. On 23 August 1989, with the occasion of the celebration of Romania's national day, 2,152 officers were supposed to be promoted in rank. Such a measure could be taken once a year and only by the president of the Republic or by the Prime Minister.

²⁵¹ Iliescu, *The lived revolution*, 33–37.

²⁵² The Petre Roman government, 26 December 1989 – 27 June 1990. See Neagoe, *A history of Romania's governments, 1859–1995*, 247.

Since promotions in rank had not been made for some time, the respective officers were waiting with anxiety the promised promotion of 23 August.²⁵³ In the end, the promotion did not take place and thus a large number of officers felt deprived, which added to the overall frustration felt by numerous officers of the Romanian army.²⁵⁴ To sum up, in December 1989, the general perception within the military profession was that the army was increasingly de-professionalized due to the increasing involvement in economic activities, especially in agriculture and construction works. Many felt that their profession was despised and its importance minimized. Furthermore, the economic crisis did not spare those wearing a military uniform. In general, army officers had some possibilities to buy foodstuffs at small stores located within their units, but the supply was erratic and the quantities insufficient. On top of this, the fact that over two thousands officers were denied the promotion in rank added heavily to both the relative and absolute frustration felt by the military. In this respect, the relative frustration originated by the comparison with the troops belonging to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which in general were not obliged to work in agriculture or constructions.²⁵⁵ As for absolute frustration, it was related to the impossibility to provide for one's family. Thus, in early December 1989, a majority of the population, including the military, was deeply frustrated with the regime and hoped for a change. Against this background, the revolution sparked in Timișoara on 16 December 1989.

²⁵³ Moreover, as historian Florin Constantiniu has stated in a discussion with the present author, some of the officers were told that their promotion was sure so that they borrowed money and made preparations for celebrating the event with their family, friends and colleagues.

²⁵⁴ Codrescu, ed., *The Romanian army in the 1989 Revolution*, 39 and Urdăreanu, *1989 – Witness and participant*, 33–34.

²⁵⁵ Urdăreanu, *1989 – Witness and participant*, 33.

As shown above, the troops belonging to the Ministry of Internal Affairs attempted initially at suppressing the revolt. The troops were overwhelmed and therefore, at 2045 hours on 16 December 1989, Radu Bălan, the first secretary of the Timiș County, asked the lieutenant-colonel Constantin Zeca to provide military troops and armored vehicles to patrol the city and re-establish order. At 2130 hours, the Ministry of National Defense, General Vasile Milea, ordered Zeca to send into the city five patrols of ten soldiers each, in total 50 troops. Subsequently, there were sent other ten patrols, comprising 100 soldiers. An antiaircraft unit led by Colonel Constantin Rotaru was ordered to provide another nine patrols (90 soldiers). The military patrols went into Timișoara's downtown and operated arrests. According to military sources, the patrols were withdrawn on 17 December around 0400 hours.²⁵⁶

Meanwhile, in Bucharest, the Party leadership organized an extraordinary meeting of the Executive Political Committee of the RCP chaired by Ceaușescu himself. After the meeting, a delegation composed of generals from the Ministry of National Defense and the Ministry of Internal Affairs was ordered to fly to Timișoara. From the part of the military, the delegation was composed of: (1) General-major Ștefan Gușă; (2) General-lieutenant Victor Atanasie Stănculescu; (3) General-lieutenant Mihai Chițac; (4) General-major Florea Cârneanu; and (5) Colonel Gheorghe Radu.²⁵⁷

The protests in Timișoara radicalized during the day of 17 December 1989. As a consequence, the involvement of the military increased. In many respects, the moment when the army was asked to patrol the streets, first to maintain order and then to repress the revolted crowds in Timișoara and subsequently in Bucharest was the moment when the regime was doomed. An army of conscripts, de-professionalized and humiliated had little chances to identify itself

²⁵⁶ Codrescu, ed., *The Romanian army in the 1989 Revolution*, 56.

²⁵⁷ Codrescu, ed., *The Romanian army in the 1989 Revolution*, 50.

with the regime. Nevertheless, one should not forget that beginning with the moment when the partial alarm – password “Radu cel Frumos” – was ordered on 17 December 1989 at 1800 hours, the army, officers and soldiers alike, was practically cut off from the outside world. From that moment on, the information the commanders of military units received came only through official channels. Consequently, the first impression of many officers was that Romania was indeed faced with a foreign military intervention, supported by terrorist activities from within, aimed at provoking the secession of the province of Transylvania from Romania.²⁵⁸ Therefore, when analyzing the reaction of the troops in the face of revolted crowds and isolated, violent small groups, one should also consider that many officers and soldiers feared the worst.

The shooting in Timișoara started during the night of 17/18 December 1989. In general, sources from the military and the Ministry of Internal Affairs indicate – rather obliquely – to groups of violent young people who spoke Romanian with difficulty as being at the origin of violence. In this respect, references abound. Such affirmations point towards a conspiracy meant to nurture unrest and provoke a popular revolt. At the same time, this kind of information is almost impossible to verify since not a single person involved in those events was brought to justice. Furthermore, according to the sources cited above, a similar scenario, that is, small, determined, violent and well-trained groups of young people, suspiciously synchronized in their actions was repeated in all the cities and towns where protests occurred *before* 22 December 1989. The identity of those who were part of those groups remains a mystery. It is striking that none of the most comprehensive works on the involvement of the army and the Ministry of Internal Affairs in the events of 1989 provides any precise information about the

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 31.

individuals who allegedly engaged in diversions in the initial phase of the revolution.²⁵⁹

At the same time, when assessing the ability of many demonstrators to fight against the intervention troops with improvised means one should consider that many segments of the population had been exposed to a certain degree of military training. This was the result of the military doctrine devised under the Ceaușescu regime, which was based on the principle of a “war fought by the entire people.” According to such a doctrine, all localities, cities, towns, communes, villages, as well as industrial units such as factories and enterprises were supposed to become “citadels of work, struggle and defense.” A consequence of Ceaușescu’s military doctrine was that a majority of the population was exposed to military training and was familiar with the handling of a usual Kalashnikov-type sub-machine gun. Many witness accounts speak not only of demonstrators’ knowledge in handling military equipment, but also of their ability to prepare Molotov cocktails and to immobilize armored vehicles and tanks. In this respect, one hypothesis is conspicuously absent: the fact that in communist Romania a majority of the young men and, to a lesser extent, women underwent a sort of military service. One should also notice that in communist Romania the military service was compulsory. This author, for instance, after taking the admission exam at the polytechnic institute in Bucharest, served for nine months in the army and only after began his university studies. It was also a possibility to serve only six months, but after the completion of university studies. Those who did not pursue university studies were obliged to serve in the army for sixteen months. No matter how long one served in the army it was obvious

²⁵⁹ For the time being, the most minute analyses of the participation of the army and the troops of the Ministry of Internal Affairs are Codrescu, ed., *The Romanian army in the 1989 Revolution* and, respectively, Pitulescu, ed., *The Ministry of Internal Affairs in December 1989*.

that they would acquire a certain familiarity with the military equipment. Thus, those who served in tank or mechanized infantry units were more or less familiar with the armored vehicles and the ways to immobilize them with rather simple means. This author, for instance, who served in an antiaircraft artillery battalion, is familiar with the antiaircraft cannon caliber 57 mm. Colleagues who served in tank units do know more about the tanks that were used by the military in the late 1980s. Similarly, many of those who served in mechanized infantry units are able to find and exploit the weak points of a TAB, that is, the Armored Auto Transporter (*Transportor Auto Blindat*) which was used to disperse the revolutionaries in Timișoara and Bucharest. For instance, a participant to the revolution in Timișoara, Traian Orban, a veterinary by profession, describes the way he participated to the immobilization of a tank in Timișoara, on 17 December:

For a while, a tank stopped nearby a tram stop and was immediately surrounded by young people who were trying to block it. A few youngsters wanted to introduce a metal bar and other objects between the caterpillar tracks. I helped them by introducing the tank's pull rope between its caterpillar tracks. The tank was blocked, but its turret rotated threateningly in all directions. A boy was riding the tank's barrel. I told the youngsters to stuff the exhaust pipe with pieces of cloth, what they did. The tank's engine stopped and crowd cheered on.²⁶⁰

It seems that in their attempt to decipher the “mysteries” of the 1989 revolution many authors simply failed to notice the fact that among the protesters there were numerous those who had some basic information about the military equipment. At the same time, the army recruits sent to suppress the popular revolt experienced the events differently. Under psychological pressure, faced with violent actions and unprepared for street fighting, the recruits were in a totally

²⁶⁰ Account by Traian Orban. See Mioc, *The revolution in Timișoara*, 44–46.

new, frightening situation. As historian Alin Ciupală – a then recruit in Timișoara placed at the frontline – told the present author, the situation on the streets was terribly tense and the recruits truly feared the worst in face of the angered crowds of protesters. In such moments, the young recruits became scared and it was up to each of them to decide what to do: some did not shoot at all, some shot in the air, others shot low while others, scared to death, shot to kill. The then Corporal Nicu Marian, on duty during the night of 17/18 December 1989, recalls:

A group of 3–4 manifestants walked toward us. The four of us shouted the warnings: “Freeze!” then “Freeze where you are!” and “Freeze or I fire!” The three young men who were walking toward us did not obey our orders and said that we did not possess real ammunition but only exercise ammunition. After the warning ‘Freeze or I fire!’ all the four of us shot a warning fire in the air. At that moment, other youngsters left the column of protesters and advanced toward us. When the three young men approached at ten meters, we shot low, at their legs.²⁶¹

Army officers did the same. A witness account of the events of 17 December in Timișoara reads: “I saw an army officer getting out of the garrison building, reaching under the mantle, producing a pistol and starting shooting at the crowd. He also injured two soldiers.”²⁶² Another witness, Elena Aparaschivei, confesses: “When the group of soldiers arrived in the front of the block of flats, one of them, older and wearing a moustache, projected the beam of an electric torch toward us and then fired some shots at us. My husband was shot in the breast and fell on his back.”²⁶³

In many respects, the situation repeated itself in Bucharest during the night of 21–22 December 1989. In Bucharest, however, it took

²⁶¹ Ibid., 78.

²⁶² Iordan Florea’s account on the death of his son Iordan Silviu Sebastian. Mioc, *The revolution in Timișoara*, 127.

²⁶³ Ibid., 85.

just one night for the protest to generalize. Furthermore, the suicide of General Vasile Milea on 22 December in the morning precipitated the decision of many military commanders to switch sides. (Until new information becomes available one is compelled to stick to the official version provided by the military, which is also the most documented for the moment.) A detailed event-centered account of the events in Bucharest is provided above. However, one should note that at the moment when the crowds entered the Palace Square in Bucharest not a single fire was shot at the revolutionaries. According to military experts, the firepower of a Kalashnikov sub-machine gun, within a 300 meters range, is devastating. As a former Securitate officer told the present author, only someone who did not serve in the army could underestimate the effect a single platoon equipped with usual Kalashnikovs and defensive grenades would have had on a square packed with people. Such an assertion is supported by one of Ceaușescu's architects, Camil Roguski, who recalls a discussion with an army colonel in charge with guarding the building of the CC of the RCP. The respective colonel told Roguski that around 180 officers – each of them equipped with two submachine guns and 10,000 rounds of ammunition – guarded the CC building. “In five minutes – the colonel affirmed – we could terminate the persons in the [Palace] Square and we would still have ammunition for another two squares.”²⁶⁴

To sum up, the process of fraternization between the army and protesters was not as smooth as the official sources indicate. A great deal of confusion, lack of training, fear, frustration, and occasionally sheer stupidity made such a process difficult. Some officers and soldiers joined a revolution, which at the time not many believed that it would succeed.²⁶⁵ Such people really took a major risk and

²⁶⁴ Petcu and Roguski, *Ceaușescu: Hidden truths*, 191.

²⁶⁵ In this respect, the account of Gabriel Mitroi, an officer on duty on the military airfield Giarmata (nearby Timișoara) in December 1989 is extremely telling. See *Timișoara 16–22 Decembrie 1989*, 179–222.

their moral choice should be praised. Others, although did not join the revolution, preferred to wait and see. Their stance also favored the collapse of the regime, because their passivity contributed in avoiding a massacre in Timișoara, Bucharest and many other cities in Romania. Ultimately, it was due to the humiliation and de-professionalization experienced by many members of the military during the 1980s that the fraternization of the army with the protesters became possible in December 1989.

The Securitate

The Securitate epitomized the systematic infringement of the basic human rights perpetrated by the communist regime in Romania. Although the research on the Securitate has gained momentum in Romania especially during the period 2005–2010, numerous questions related to the involvement of the Securitate in the December 1989 events have remained unanswered to this day. One should not forget that the Securitate was officially dismantled immediately after the regime change through the Decree-law no. 4 of 26 December 1989 issued by the Council of the National Salvation Front (*Consiliul Frontului Salvării Naționale* – CFSN).²⁶⁶ It took

²⁶⁶ See “Decret privind trecerea în componența Ministerului Apărării Naționale a Departamentului Securității Statului și a altor organe din subordinea Ministerului de Interne” (Decree regarding the transfer to the Ministry of National Defense of the Department for State Security and other organs of the Ministry of Internal Affairs) no. 4 of 26 December 1989; published in the *Monitorul Oficial al României* (Official Bulletin of Romania) No. 0005 of 27 December 1989; http://www.monitoruloficial.ro/mofnou/index.php?page=acts&action=search&term=&nr=&date=&date_end=&pg=9753; accessed 14 November 2010.

however some ten years for the post-communist regime in Romania to establish an official agency – the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (*Consiliul Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității* – CNSAS) in charge with administration of the Securitate files. Nevertheless, in spite of the growing corpus of works on the structure, methods and wrongdoings of the former Securitate, not much has been brought to light with regard to the involvement of the Securitate in the regime change of December 1989. This section provides a brief account on the ongoing systematic research of the Securitate archives and puts forward a series of issues related to the implication of the Securitate in the 1989 regime change that require further exploration.

Debates on the moral obligation of dealing with the wrongdoings of the communist secret police – the infamous Securitate – gained momentum after the first shift in power that occurred in post-communist Romania in 1996. The former political prisoners played a paramount role in pushing for a complex solution in dealing with the crimes and abuses of the defunct communist regime, all the more that they were prominent in all three “historical” parties mentioned above, i.e. the National Peasant Party, National Liberal Party and the Romanian Social-Democratic Party. In addition, the former political prisoners organized themselves from the very days of the 1989 revolution in an association of the survivors of the Romanian Gulag. The Association of the Former Political Prisoners in Romania (*Asociația Foștilor Deținuți Politici din România* – AFDPR) worked in close association with the “historical” parties, especially with the National Peasant Party, and other civil society organizations. At the same time, the AFDPR promoted a specific agenda related to restitution for all those who had been politically persecuted under communism.²⁶⁷ To

²⁶⁷ AFDPR was established on 2 January 1990, and, by the end of the year, it enrolled 98,700 members. AFDPR was an exemplary case of self-organization of interests, being the first group that succeeded in legalizing its existence and publicly

the former political prisoners the process of communism meant not only bringing the perpetrators to justice, but also restituting to the victims their proper place in society by acknowledging the injustice made to them by the communist regime.

From a legal point of view, one of greatest victories of the AFDPR was the passing of the Law 187/1999 or the “Law regarding the access to the personal file and the disclosure of the Securitate as political police” by the Romanian Parliament in December 1999. Known to everyone as the “Ticu Law” after its main proponent, former senator of the National Peasant Party and president of AFDPR, the late Constantin Ticu Dumitrescu (1928–2008), it was voted only after years of heated debates and repeated modifications. From its very title, one can see that the law is granting to Romanian citizens as well as to present day foreign citizens that had been citizens of Romania after 1945 the right to access their Securitate files. Furthermore, Law 187/1999 has created for the first time a legal framework for the study of the Securitate archives by any citizen interested in assessing “the political police activities of the former secret police in order to offer to society as correct as possible a picture of the communist period.”

In order to achieve such an ambitious goal, a new institution was established, the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives, which has been destined to take over the files of the former secret police. The institution is led by a Collegium composed of eleven persons. Of them, nine are nominated by the political parties – in accordance with their representation in the Parliament, one is

advocating the interests of its members. The Decree-Law No. 118 of 1990 granted special rights to former political prisoners, including medical care, and local transport free of charge, subventions for medicines, limited free railroad transport, etc. For the Decree-Law No. 118 regarding the rights of the persons politically persecuted by the dictatorship established on 6 March 1945, see *Monitorul Oficial al României* (Official Bulletin of Romania), No. 118, 18 April 1998, 5–7.

nominated by the President, and one by the Prime Minister.²⁶⁸ The major function of CNSAS is to provide evidence for unmasking the former employees (agents) and informal collaborators of the secret police, and thus enabling lustration. In this respect, the Collegium was empowered to check holders of, and candidates for, public offices and assess if they were involved in the activities of “the Securitate as political police.” The concept of “political police” (*poliție politică*) was defined by Law 187/1999 in order to apply lustration – understood as conditioning the access to public offices on certificates of morality based on the archives of the former secret police. Romanian Parliament decided that the pivotal idea at the basis of Law 187 has to be that of individual responsibility and by no means that of collective guilt – based on a simple association with the Securitate. Thus, the Romanian law focuses on individual deeds and on proof “beyond any reasonable doubt” similar to the German legislation, and not on the position the respective people occupied.

The Romanian law stipulated that political police included “all those structures of the secret police created in order to establish and maintain the communist totalitarian power, and to suppress and restrict the fundamental human rights and liberties.” In short, this law has been conceived to be as consistent as possible to the rule-of-law principles. According to Article 3 of Law 187/1999, people seeking, or occupying, public office must fill in a special form in which they have to state if they were or not agents or collaborators of the former communist secret police. Disqualification of persons proven by CNSAS to have been agents or collaborators of the Securitate occurs only if they did not acknowledge their position within, or their collaboration with, the Securitate apparatus when completing the above mentioned form. If collaboration is proven

²⁶⁸ The Law No. 187 of 7 December 1999 was published in *Monitorul Oficial al României* (Official Bulletin of Romania), No. 603, 9 December 1999, 1–5. For more on this institution, visit its website at www.cnsas.ro.

and has not been acknowledged, the respective person is to be charged with false statements provided in a public document. Nonetheless, up to the year 2006, the application of Law 187/1999 proved to be very difficult, and it may be argued that a major hindrance in this respect was the lack of political will by the Constantinescu (1996–2000) and the second Iliescu (2000–2004) regimes to push for the transfer of the Securitate archives to the CNSAS. Moreover, the verification of individuals based on what they did represents a difficult operation that requires the work of many people over a very long period of time. As compared to the Federal Agency for the Administration of the Stasi Files (BStU), which employed some 3,300 people over the first fifteen years of its existence or the Polish Institute of National Remembrance (IPN), which employs some 2,145 people, the Romanian CNSAS has 300 posts provided in its structure of personnel, of which only 245 are actually occupied.²⁶⁹

One can identify three stages in the ten-year long history of the CNSAS. During the first stage, i.e. 2000–2005, CNSAS has been confronted with major problems related to the transfer of the archives of the former Securitate – hosted mainly by the Romanian Intelligence Service (*Serviciul Român de Informații* – SRI); the Foreign Intelligence Service (*Serviciul de Informații Externe* – SIE) and the Ministry of National Defense (*Ministerul Apărării Naționale* – MapN) – to its archive. In fact, since its establishment in the year 2000, CNSAS has constantly struggled with the above mentioned institutions over the custody of the documents produced by the former Securitate. Over the period 2000–2005, such documents were

²⁶⁹ For more on the mission and structure of the official institutions in charge with the files of the former communist secret police agencies in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia see *The “European Network of Official Authorities in Charge of the Secret-Police Files:” A Reader on their Legal Foundations, Structures and Activities*, compiled, edited and published by BStU (Berlin, 2009).

transferred to CNSAS very selectively. Nevertheless, after the general elections of 2004, things changed tremendously.

The second stage of CNSAS activity was inaugurated in mid-December 2005, when SRI donated over 1 million files to CNSAS, which had to inaugurate a new building for their preservation. A Government Ordinance (No. 149 of 10 November 2005, extended the application of the law for another six years under a new Collegium. Also, the functioning of the CNSAS has been improved by Government's Ordinance No. 16 of 27 February 2006 and Government's Decision No. 731 of 7 June 2006.²⁷⁰ Furthermore, over the period April-August 2006 a number of four decisions of Romania's Supreme Council of National Defense (*Consiliul Suprem de Apărare a Țării* – CSAT) have made possible the transfer to the CNSAS archive of 1.555.905 files comprising 1.894.076 volumes, which amount to some 24 km of archive. As a result, the activity of the CNSAS has gained momentum. For instance, according to the CNSAS Annual Activity Report 2006, during the year 2006 only the institution has unmasked 270 informal collaborators of the Securitate, which represents more than the number of informers unmasked during the entire period 2000–2005. It may be thus argued that the activity of CNSAS has taken momentum from early 2006 onwards and consequently more and more public figures – from politicians to the higher clergy and from all fields of activity, ranging from the judiciary to the academia – were gradually disclosed as former collaborators. At the same time, the insufficient personnel could not do wonders with a huge archive that had to be simultaneously investigated and put in order. Time and again, the media raised questions about the destruction of relevant files after 1989. Indeed, the collaboration of prominent politicians was revealed not by their personal files, which

²⁷⁰ Law 187/1999 underwent some modifications. In this respect, see *Monitorul Oficial al României* (Official Bulletin of Romania), No. 182, 27 February 2006, 1–8. For the extension of the activity of CNSAS, see *Monitorul Oficial al României* (Official Bulletin of Romania), No. 1008, 14 November 2005, 7–8.

were not preserved in many cases, but by the files of their victims, in which evidence of collaboration (usually copies of informative notes) was found. In other words, even though some files of former collaborators are now missing, their informative notes can still be found in the files of those on whom the respective individuals provided information, so that the process of unmasking the acts of collaboration is neither totally irrelevant nor useless.

The third stage in the activity of the CNSAS was inaugurated in January 2008, when the Romanian Constitutional Court (*Curtea Constituțională a României* – CCR) decided on several grounds that the Law 187/1999 was in fact unconstitutional. The decision was highly contested and commented as another attempt of the neo-communist camp to stop a process that finally started to look promising.²⁷¹ The sole genuine problem though was the simultaneous function of prosecutor and judge performed by the CNSAS Collegium, which was empowered by the law of 1999 not only to search for proofs of collaboration with the Securitate as “political police,” but also to formulate a first judgment on the collaboration of the persons under verification. Consequently, CNSAS functioned on a governmental ordinance until November 2008, when a new law was passed.²⁷² The

²⁷¹ For an insightful analysis of the CCR decision see Corneliu-Liviu Popescu, “Uzurparea de putere comisă de Curtea Constituțională în cazul cenzurii dispozițiilor legale privind deconspirarea poliției politice comuniste” (The usurpation of authority by the Constitutional Court in the case of censoring the legal dispositions regarding the unmasking of the communist political police), in *Noua Revistă de Drepturile Omului*, Vol. 4, 1 (2008), 3–14.

²⁷² Both the decision of the Constitutional Court regarding the non-constitutionality of Law 187/1999 and the Governmental Ordinance of February 2008 that provided a legal basis for prolonging the activity of CNSAS were published together in *Monitorul Oficial al României* (Official Bulletin of Romania), No. 95, 6 February 2008, 2–8 and 9–10. A subsequent Governmental Ordinance of March 2008 ensured the functioning of CNSAS until a new law was passed. See *Monitorul Oficial al României* (Official Bulletin of Romania), No. 182, 10 March 2008, 2–10.

new legislation is though more restrictive than the previous one with regard to disqualification, but it ultimately allows more transparency in the process of unmasking former collaborators. As mentioned above, the initial law was based on the concept of “political police,” according to which an act of collaboration meant any denunciation that implied an infringement of the rights guaranteed by the communist Constitution. The new law defines the collaboration with the Securitate as those acts that not only violated fundamental rights of individuals, but also “denounced activities or attitudes adverse to the communist state.”²⁷³ This principle of simultaneity – infringement of fundamental rights *and* denunciation of anti-regime attitudes and activities – obviously reduces the number of cases that can be brought in front of the administrative court of justice on the grounds of collaboration with the Securitate. In spite of the initial reservations and criticism coming especially from civil society organizations, the new legislation has unleashed a multifaceted process of unmasking and exposing the repressive actions of the Securitate. For instance, under the new legislation the number of informers whose real names were communicated to the persons that accessed their personal files increased from 610 in 2008 to 739 in 2009. Furthermore, the number of cases brought in front of the administrative court of justice in order to assess officially collaboration with the former communist secret police by individuals has increased from 292 in 2008 to 560 in 2009.²⁷⁴ Furthermore, the public exposure of the agents (officers) and informal collaborators of the Securitate has enhanced

²⁷³ For the text of the law that sanctioned the Governmental Ordinance of March 2008 and which constitutes the current legal basis for the functioning of the CNSAS see *Monitorul Oficial al României* (Official Bulletin of Romania), No. 800, 28 November 2008, 1–4.

²⁷⁴ Data provided in the CNSAS Annual Report 2009. Details on the activity of the CNSAS – related legislation, annual activity reports, research projects, publications etc. – can be found on its institutional website at www.cnsas.ro.

tremendously the knowledge on the structure, methods and wrongdoings of the communist secret police.²⁷⁵

The ongoing systematic research on the Securitate files, however, has told us little about the involvement of the former communist secret police in the December 1989 events. There are at least two reasons for such a situation. First, information on the involvement of the Securitate in the 1989 events might have been contained by some of the so-called operative files related to the cases the Securitate operatives were working on in December 1989. Such files were not closed and classified in the Securitate archives and were among the first to be destroyed during the days of the revolution by the Securitate personnel. Second, it is very likely that important orders given to the Securitate operatives in those days in December 1989 were verbal and not written, and thus might never be found in written form in a Securitate file. In light of the above, there is no wonder that numerous questions remained unanswered to this day. There are at least three major issues that deserve further examination that concern the implication of the Securitate in the violent regime change in Romania in December 1989: (1) the conspiracy scenario; (2) the bloody repression (17/18 December in Timișoara and 21/22 December 1989 in Bucharest); and (3) the mystery the so-called terrorists (22–25 December 1989).

²⁷⁵ See for instance: *Securitatea: Structuri/Cadre. Obiective și metode* (The Securitate: Structures/Cadres. Objectives and methods) vol. I (1948–1967); vol. II (1967–1989), ed. by Florica Dobre with Florian Banu, Theodor Bărbulescu, Camelia Duică, Liviu Țăranu, Elis Neagoe-Pleșa, and Liviu Pleșa (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică & CNSAS, 2006); *Trupele de Securitate, 1949–1989* (The Securitate troops, 1949–1989) ed. by Florica Dobre with Florian Banu, Camelia Duică, Silviu B. Moldovan, and Liviu Țăranu. Bucharest: Editura Nemira & CNSAS, 2004); *Arhivele Securității* (Archives of the Securitate) Vol. 1 (Bucharest: Editura Pro-Historia, 2002); *Arhivele Securității* (Archives of the Securitate) Vol. 2 (Bucharest: Editura Nemira, 2004); *Arhivele Securității* (Archives of the Securitate) Vol. 3 (Bucharest: Editura Nemira, 2006); and *Arhivele Securității* (Archives of the Securitate) Vol. 4 (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2009).

The conspiracy scenario. As discussed above in Chapter 2 of this book, many of those who reflected upon the 1989 regime change in Romania have explained those violent events as the result of a conspiracy. Such an interpretation was favored especially by former Securitate officers that could thus justify the repressive measures taken at the time by the Securitate against the protesters by arguing that the secret police was simply defending the country against a conspiracy involving major foreign secret services.²⁷⁶ For instance, Filip Teodorescu, a former deputy of the head of the counterintelligence section of the Securitate asserted in his book of memoirs that the violent events of December 1989 were stirred from outside the country, following an agreement between “West and East,” i.e. between the United States and the Soviet Union.²⁷⁷ Niculae Mavru, the former head of the Surveillance and Investigation Section of the Timișoara branch of the Securitate, supports a similar version insisting on the Soviet involvement.²⁷⁸ Alex Mihai Stoenescu features prominently among the authors who consistently supported the thesis of an international conspiracy that provoked the demise of the Ceaușescu regime in 1989. In the book length interview realized by Stoenescu with Virgil Măgureanu – the first director of the post-communist Romanian Intelligence Service, Măgureanu and Stoenescu agree upon the idea of an implication of foreign secret services in the initiation of the mass protest in Bucharest on 21 December 1989.²⁷⁹ Former president Emil Constantinescu (1996–2000) has stated

²⁷⁶ For a brief survey of such conspiracy theories see Perva and Roman, *The mysteries of the Romanian revolution*.

²⁷⁷ Teodorescu, *Timișoara, December 1989*, 43–51.

²⁷⁸ Mavru, *Memoirs of the former head of the Timișoara Surveillance and Investigation section*, 60–64.

²⁷⁹ Virgil Măgureanu with Alex Mihai Stoenescu, *De la regimul comunist la regimul Iliescu: Virgil Măgureanu în dialog cu Alex Mihai Stoenescu* (From the communist regime to the Iliescu regime: Virgil Măgureanu in dialogue with Alex Mihai Stoenescu) (Bucharest: Editura Rao, 2008), 116–22.

bluntly that in December 1989 Romania witnessed a coup d'état organized by a group of high-ranking pro-Soviet army and Securitate officers with Soviet support. According to Constantinescu, the Romanian revolution was violent because Ceaușescu did not accept to resign at Soviet pressure and "the authors of the coup d'état of 22 December were *nomenklatura* and *Securitate* members that needed to legitimate themselves in the eyes of the people [emphasis added]." ²⁸⁰

The repression. Testimonies by former Securitate operatives engaged in surveillance missions in December 1989 affirm that a high degree of provocation by foreign citizens existed during the events in Timișoara and Bucharest.²⁸¹ Direct participants to the events have talked about groups of committed young people that engaged in violent actions. Such groups operated in Timișoara and witness accounts often converge when describe them: groups of three to five young males who broke the shop windows with metal bars and other objects, but did not steal anything. A revolutionary remembers: "We [the protesters] told them not to do such a thing, because this was not what we wanted. But they carried on, accomplishing their mission."²⁸² Radu Cheptenariu recalls the events he witnessed on 17 December: "The crowd was shouting: 'Down with Ceaușescu!' 'Freedom!' 'Romanians, join us!' Three men came out of the crowd and broke the windows of the food store, took some beverage bottles and threw them to the shelves and the remaining windows. Then, they went in the back of the store. Afterwards, other people started to ransack."²⁸³

²⁸⁰ Emil Constantinescu, *Adevărul despre România* (The truth about Romania) (Bucharest: Editura Universală, 2004), 113–181; the phrase quoted is at p. 181.

²⁸¹ Mavru, *Memoirs of the former head of the Timișoara Surveillance and Investigation section*, 101.

²⁸² Testimony of Orban; another participant, Anton Suharu, also speaks of such groups of young males. See Mioc, *The revolution in Timișoara*, 44 and 107–108, respectively.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 105.

However, the direct implication of the Securitate agents in the bloody repression of the demonstrators in Timișoara and Bucharest, as well in other urban centers throughout the country, is not easy to demonstrate. In this respect, the role of the Securitate was more intricate because in December 1989 on the frontline there were the army and the Militia and not the Securitate operatives. The revolutionaries saw the army and the Militia firing at the protesters. Although some witness accounts referred to civilians who shot to kill from behind the regular troops or from the terraces of the nearby buildings, the evidence is scarce and few former agents have been willing to talk about their missions in December 1989. Rumors and hearsay abound and evidence is difficult to gather. Yet, one should also consider that the Securitate operatives were among the best informed about the real situation in the country as well as at the level of the Soviet bloc. Thus, although the Securitate never opposed the regime up to its very end, at the individual or group level attitudes of wait and see did emerge as well.

The “terrorists.” What happened after 1208 hours on 22 December 1989 represents an equally intriguing and intricate story. The period 22–25 December 1989, i.e. the period inaugurated by the flight of the Ceaușescu couple from the upper platform of the building of the CC of the RCP and concluded by their hasten execution, requires a minute reconstruction that goes beyond the scope of this book. Nevertheless, it is a fact that more people were killed after 22 December 1989 than before. Thus, while 162 persons were killed and 1,107 were wounded before 22 December, as many as 942 people were killed and 2,245 were wounded after that date.²⁸⁴ However, not a single “terrorist” was brought in to trial in Romania. Those who poured into the streets in December 1989 have the right to ask about the identity of the so-called “terrorists” whom the army fought fiercely until 25 December. In the Romanian case, the “Rashomon effect”

²⁸⁴ Constantinescu, *The truth about Romania*, 113.

discussed in Chapter 2 was born of the protracted inquiry on the 1989 events carried out by the Romanian authorities over the last twenty years. Institutions such as the CNSAS or history research institutes have limited means of inquiry with regard to the involvement of the Securitate operatives in the bloody events of December 1989. The judiciary must pronounce a court verdict in this respect. Individuals and civic organization have constantly asked for the resolving of the massive file of the Revolution of 1989. Twenty years after the events, the judiciary still deliberates on the case. Exasperated by the situation, Teodor Mărieș – the leader of the most active association of the 1989 revolutionaries, the 21 December 1989 Association – was on hunger strike for 78 days, beginning on 11 January 2010.²⁸⁵ Among others, Mărieș asked for the declassifying of the multivolume file of the Romanian revolution of 1989. With the declassifying of the 1989 Revolution file, it seems that Romania has entered a new phase of the process of coming to terms with the traumatic events of December 1989.

²⁸⁵ For details, visit the site of the association at <http://www.asociatia21decembrie.ro/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/gr-foamei-2-e1263738719135.jpg>; accessed 16 November 2010.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

THE REVOLUTION EXPLAINED

This book puts forward a frame of analysis for explaining the 1989 events in East-Central Europe (ECE) and applies it systematically to the case of Romania. When examining those particular events, one faces difficult problems of definition. Consequently, the discussion opens with a comparative analysis of the most significant similarities and differences between the 1989 events and the great, “classic” revolutions of the modern age. This analysis concludes that the 1989 events in ECE can be termed as revolutions. They were, however, revolutions of a particular kind because they were non-utopian, non-violent (with the exception of Romania), and were not carried out in the name of a particular class. Timing, sequence of events and nature – negotiated or non-negotiated, violent or non-violent, are crucial issues that one has to address when examining the 1989 revolutions. The present work proposes an explanatory model applicable to all the revolutions of 1989 that combines a culturalist approach with structural analysis, and takes into consideration the issue of contingency. This book is therefore based on the key concepts of *culture*, *structure* and *contingency*, and contends that the collapse of the communist rule in ECE was provoked by an interplay of nation-specific, structural, and conjunctural factors, which ultimately determined the timing, sequence, and nature of those events.

Following S. N. Eisenstadt, this author proposes the generic term “postmodern” revolutions when referring to the 1989 revolutions in ECE and introduces the *1989 sequence of collapse* of communist dictatorships in ECE. The argument is that in 1989 six communist dictatorships in ECE collapsed in the following order: Poland, Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Romania. At the same time, this author contends that the 1989 sequence of collapse, i.e. Poland – Hungary – East Germany – Czechoslovakia – Bulgaria – Romania, consisted in fact of the demise of three types of communist dictatorships: “national-accommodative” (Poland and Hungary); “welfare” (East Germany and Czechoslovakia); and modernizing-nationalizing (Bulgaria and Romania). Kitschelt, Mansfeldova, Markowski, and Tóka have coined the term “national-accommodative” employed for the communist dictatorships in Poland and Hungary. Following Jarausch, the term utilized to describe the communist dictatorships in East Germany and Czechoslovakia is that of “welfare dictatorships.” Finally, with regard to Romania and Bulgaria this author proposes the term *modernizing-nationalizing* communist dictatorships. The emphasis on the “dynamic political stance” is essential since the communist power elites in both countries perceived their party-states in the making as not completely modern *and* national, and therefore devised policies aimed at spurring industrial development and creating ethnically homogenous “socialist” nations.

As already noted, this book puts forward a theoretical model that enables one to explain the inception, unfolding, and outcome of the 1989 revolutions in ECE. This model is based on the three categories mentioned above, i.e. structure, culture, and contingency. The main assumption is that the 1989 revolutions were determined by a complicated and sometimes perplexing aggregation of *structural*, *nation-specific* and *conjunctural* factors. These factors operated and interacted in various ways in each of the countries analyzed, but they were nevertheless present in each case. Such a model is able to

accommodate issues of path-dependency, patterns of compliance and contestation under communist rule and questions of interdependence at both international and Soviet Bloc level. The particular way in which the above-mentioned factors aggregated determined eventually the nature of the revolution in each of the cases discussed, i.e. negotiated or non-negotiated, peaceful or violent, as well as the order in which the six communist dictatorships were overthrown. Nørgaard and Sampson, who have explained the birth of the Polish Solidarity as an outcome of social and cultural factors, have inspired this kind of model.

With regard to the case of Romania, one can formulate three fundamental questions related to the Romanian revolution, starting from three concepts, as follows. *Timing*: Why Romania occupies the last position within the 1989 sequence of collapse? *Nature*: Why the Romanian revolution was the only non-negotiated and violent of the 1989 revolutions in ECE? *Outcome*: Why the bloody revolution in Romania brought the second- and third-rank nomenklatura members to power and thus delayed the process of democratic consolidation? Given the peculiarities of the Romanian case, before applying the model presented above to the Romanian case, this work discusses the conflicting representations of the Romanian revolution in post-communism and the importance of a thorough event-centered reconstruction of the December 1989 events. The discussion on the conflicting representations of the revolution stresses the highly controversial legacy of the Romanian revolution, which led to the appearance of an enduring “Rashomon effect” with regard to the 1989 events. The concise event-centered historical reconstruction of the December 1989 events in Timișoara and Bucharest, based primarily on the recollections of the participants to those events, illustrates the fact that people in the street perceived the 1989 events as revolutionary.

Turning to the explanatory model presented above, the first factors analyzed have been the “structural” factors, i.e. those factors

characteristic to all Soviet-type societies: *economic decline* and *ideological decay*. In terms of *economic decline*, this work has addressed the economic performance of the communist regime in Romania over the period 1945–1989 in order to illustrate the relationship between the severe economic crisis in the 1980s and the growing potential for social protest. Although Romania faced the most severe crisis among the six countries that experienced a regime change in 1989, it was the last to exit from communism that year. One can explain such a paradoxical situation by considering the mechanism of rising expectations and setbacks that characterized the Ceaușescu period. Apart from the industrialization process initiated by the regime, a civilizing process did take place under state socialism in Romania, which resulted in some improvements with regard to urbanization and housing, spread of education and sanitation, transportation and increased mobility by the population during the 1960s and 1970s. The severe crisis of the 1980s paved in many respects the way for the bloody revolution of 1989. Due to the miseries of everyday life, the potential for protest of a majority of the population was particularly high in the late 1980s. Major policy decisions regarding the economic development and implicitly the “socialist modernization” of the country under communist rule were made in accordance with the external constraints and the political goals of the local power elite. Thus, the period 1945–1989 has been divided into four distinct periods that represent different stages in the complicated relationship between politics and economics under communist rule in Romania. These four periods are defined as follows: (1) humble imitation of the Soviet model, 1945–1956; (2) development and emancipation, 1956–1964; (3) closely-watched relaxation, 1964–1977; and (4) crisis and decline, 1977–1989.

The period 1977–1989 illustrate the close relationship between the economic decline and the violent breakdown of the communist rule in Romania. The severe economic crisis of the period 1981–1989, especially the food shortages and the power cuts of the 1980s

were by no means the only causes of the bloody revolution in Romania. However, the everyday miseries were among the causes of the popular revolt that sparked the 1989 revolution in this country. During the 1980s, the developmental pattern imposed by the Ceaușescu regime continued to favor primary and secondary sectors with a strong emphasis on coal mining as well as on steel, heavy machinery and petrochemical industries. While these sectors were unable to produce competitive goods for export, especially for the Western markets, their functioning required a high level of energy consumption that led to an endemic energy crisis in industry. Throughout the 1980s, instead of introducing economic reforms the regime imposed harsh rationing measures that affected primarily the population. These measures concentrated on the rationing of energy consumption (e.g. power supply for household use, gasoline for private cars etc.), of food supplies (food rationing was introduced in the early 1980s), and of basic consumer goods (e.g. soap, toothpaste, detergents etc.). Thus, by the late 1980s the mistaken economic policy of the Ceaușescu regime forced a large majority of the population to think in terms of sheer biological survival. Such an economic strategy led to both absolute and relative deprivation, which affected a great majority of the population and contributed significantly to the final demise of the Romanian communist regime.

Ideological decay or the erosion of ideology was a phenomenon that other communist regimes in ECE experienced after Nikita Khrushchev presented his “secret report” to the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU on the night of 24–25 February 1956. Although Marxism-Leninism never truly appealed to the Romanian society, the regime was able to make use of nationalism as an ideological substitute, which, especially from 1968 onwards, served as ideological “cement” for the Romanian ethnic majority and legitimized the RCP rule. Ceaușescu turned Gheorghiu-Dej’s incipient nationalism into a comprehensive nation-building process aimed at creating an ethnically homogenous “socialist nation” in Romania. In August

1968, Ceaușescu publicly condemned the crushing of the Prague Spring by the Soviet led troops of the WTO and thus, the RCP gained widespread popular support almost overnight. Afterwards, Ceaușescu's nationalism acted as ideological "cement" on the background of an obvious popular distrust for Marxism-Leninism. It was only in the conditions of the deep economic crisis of the 1980s and, even more importantly, in the conditions of the radical change of policy in Moscow after the coming to power of Mikhail Gorbachev that "Ceaușescuism," as an ideological substitute for Marxism-Leninism, entered in a terminal crisis. After 1985, when large segments of the Romanian society began to look to Moscow in the hope of persuading the Ceaușescu regime to improve their living standards, *independence from Moscow* – the cornerstone of the RCP legitimacy in the post-1968 period – ceased to appeal to a majority of the people. After the launch of Gorbachev's program of reforms, emancipation from the Soviet Union lost its relevance for the Romanian population. Moscow became suddenly synonymous with restructuring and openness, while the independent Romania was heading towards disaster. In this sense ideological decay, understood as the demise of Ceaușescu's *national-communism* as an ersatz ideology, contributed significantly to the collapse of the communist rule in Romania.

Contingency played an important role in the final demise of the communist dictatorships in ECE. The present analysis has concentrated on two kinds of *conjunctural factors*, i.e. external and internal. Given the nature of the power relations between Moscow and its European satellites, an external factor – which might be called the "Kremlin factor" – always influenced the decisions made by the power elites in Sovietized Europe. Until the mid-1980s, the "Kremlin factor" was synonymous with the involvement of Moscow in the domestic affairs of the "fraternal" countries in ECE. However, once Mikhail Gorbachev came to power and engaged in a bold program

of the reforms, the “Kremlin factor” evolved into the “Gorbachev factor” and became synonymous with restructuring and openness.

The communist dictatorships in ECE proved to be particularly vulnerable to external *conjunctural* factors. Nevertheless, one has to assess the influence of such factors on the six countries that experienced a regime change in 1989 on a case-by-case basis. For instance, the Polish “negotiated revolution” initiated the “snowball effect” that had a considerable influence on the final demise of the communist regimes in Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Romania. Thus, the Polish case poses difficult problems of interpretation with regard to the set of external conjunctural factors that contributed to the demise of the communist regime exactly because a most powerful one, i.e. “the snowball effect,” was not present. As for the case of Romania, this work contends that two external conjunctural factors were of paramount importance in the collapse of communism in this country: (1) the “Gorbachev factor;” and (2) the “snowball effect.” Considering the reaction by the overwhelming majority of the population in December 1989, the present analysis has examined the role played by the international media in keeping alive, or even developing, a spirit of opposition towards the regime in communist Romania. Domestic conjuncture also influenced the demise of Romanian communism. The internal conjunctural factors, however, contributed to a lesser extent to the breakdown of the Ceaușescu regime. Nonetheless, a significant internal conjunctural factor was the *coming of age* of the 1967–1969 generation that originated in the policy of forced natality launched by Ceaușescu after his coming to power in 1965.

Nation-specific factors are responsible for the position each country occupied within the sequence of collapse as well as for the nature of the 1989 revolutions in the respective countries. The examination of this set of factors entails a discussion on political cultures at both *regime* and *community* level. As for Romania, these factors were responsible for the last position Romania occupied within the 1989

sequence of collapse as well as for the violent nature of the revolution. The analysis has addressed the attitudinal and behavioral patterns that characterize the relationship between regime and society, which emerged as result of the successive transformations of the Stalinist model imposed on the Romanian society in the immediate aftermath of World War II. These transformations took place under certain constraints imposed by the Soviet policy towards the “fraternal” countries in ECE in the general Cold War context, of which the Brezhnev Doctrine was perhaps the most significant for the purpose of this analysis. One can identify five main periods that characterize the relationship between the communist regime and the Romanian society in general over the period 1945–1989: (1) “revolution from above,” 1945–1956; (2) “community-building,” 1956–1964; (3) transition from “community-building” to nation-building, 1964–1968; (4) fully-fledged nation-building, 1968–1985; and (5) disenchantment and de-legitimation, 1985–1989. Throughout these five periods, two processes interacted permanently. On the one hand, the regime applied consistent policies meant to tame and subsequently co-opt the population. On the other hand, the population reacted to these policies in various ways ranging from collaboration to open conflict with the regime. The attitudinal and behavioral patterns that resulted from the complex interaction of these processes determined ultimately both the nature and timing of the Romanian revolution of 1989.

The Stalinist mindset of the Romanian power elite went gradually through a series of transformations beginning in 1956. Once Khrushchev inaugurated his de-Stalinization campaign, Romanian communists had to look elsewhere for legitimacy and initiated a process of “selective community-building.” Thus, they engaged in a process of creating new political meanings, shared by the communist ruling elite and the population, concerning the relationship between the Party and the society. The 1956 political developments at the Soviet bloc level imposed the devising of a new political strategy by

the power elite in Bucharest. One should stress once again the selective nature of the community building process launched in the aftermath of the 1956 events. Not all the segments of Romanian society were allowed to take part in the process. Up to the year 1964, numerous Romanian citizens were imprisoned on political grounds while their offspring were denied basic civil rights. Obviously, they were considered “enemies of the people” and the community building process was not aimed at them. De-Stalinization was a threat to Gheorghiu-Dej and his men, and a return to the people as the ultimate source of legitimacy was the only solution at hand. This is how a worldview developed within the ranks of the illegal RCP during the interwar years and subsequently in Greater Romania’s prisons was subsequently extended to the Party-State level. Gheorghiu-Dej’s recourse to Party-State building in the guise of “selective community building” created the basis for Ceaușescu’s program of Party-State building in the form of an all-embracing nation-building project.

Monolithism of the Party and *emancipation* from Moscow, as key features of the regime political culture, are largely responsible for the violent nature of the Romanian revolution of 1989. The most notable protest within the nomenklatura occurred very late, i.e. only on 14 March 1989, when the open letter signed by six former high-rank officials of the Party – Gheorghe Apostol, Alexandru Bârlădeanu, Silviu Brucan, Corneliu Mănescu, Constantin Pârvulescu and Grigore Răceanu – was broadcast by Radio Free Europe. The letter, addressed to Ceaușescu, began with an indictment of his mistaken policies. It was for the first time in communist Romania that former top Party officials were publicly criticizing Ceaușescu’s policies. The “letter of the six” marked a watershed in the history of the RCP because it represented the first major split at the level of the RCP elite. For the first time since the 1957 split at the top – the Constantinescu-Chișinevschi episode, the monolithism of the RCP was broken and a major faction of the nomenklatura openly protested against Ceaușescu’s lead. At the same time, the signatories of the letter were

already retired when RFE broadcast the text and their links with the Party were practically severed. In this respect, the letter came too late and therefore had an insignificant impact on RCP's domestic policies. In other words, the "mortal sin" of factionalism was committed too late to avoid a bloody revolution in 1989.

With regard to the legitimating power of nationalism, after the coming to power of Gorbachev in 1985 the Ceaușescu regime was left with a sole target: the Hungarian minority in Romania. Thus, on 20 December 1989 Ceaușescu affirmed that the revolt in Timișoara, which sparked the Romanian revolution, was the result of the activity of "hooligan elements, working together with reactionary, imperialistic, irredentist, chauvinistic circles ... aiming at the territorial dismemberment of Romania." Ceaușescu was hinting, among others, at neighboring Hungary and the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, the new image of the Soviet Union among Romania's population deeply undermined the propagandistic efforts of the regime. In the late 1980s, independence from Moscow ceased to be a major source of legitimacy for the communist regime in Romania. By 1989, the Romanian polity was definitely split into *us* and *them*. As for *them* – the inner circle of power around the Ceaușescu couple – they displayed a high level of cohesion, the highest among the six countries that compose the 1989 sequence of collapse, up to the very end of the regime. This explains in many respects why Romania occupies the last position, the sixth, in the said sequence. At the same time, to paraphrase the statement of a Romanian top communist official, *independence* ceased to be *their* legitimacy and this permitted popular protest to grow and spread across Romania in December 1989. It was because the RCP discourse centered on independence from Moscow lost its legitimating power in the eyes of a majority of the population that Romania was eventually able to exit from communism in 1989.

As for the community political culture, which has been termed as the *political culture(s) of resistance*, some authors argued that the

failure of the Goma movement for human rights epitomizes the entire story of Romanian dissent. Speaking about the Romanian dissidence in the 1970s, a Western specialist in East European affairs affirmed in the early 1980s that: "Romanian dissent lives in Paris and his name is Paul Goma." This seems to be true since after Goma the other radical dissidents of the 1980s, such as Doina Cornea, Dorin Tudoran, Radu Filipescu, Gabriel Andreescu or Dan Petrescu, experienced a similar loneliness of radical dissidence. Group protests developed only slowly towards the end of the 1980s and replaced timidly the isolated dissident acts by courageous individuals. In November 1989, dissident Dan Petrescu initiated a campaign of collecting signatures against the reelection of Ceaușescu at the Fourteenth Congress of the RCP. Petrescu, who was living in the Moldavian city of Iași, contacted Doina Cornea, who was living in the Transylvanian city of Cluj. It was for the first time when prominent dissidents were trying to organize a joint action against the regime. Another story, which is telling of the efforts and vacillations of the intellectuals who felt that they should do something to protest against the communist rule, is that of the "letter of the eighteen." It took a rather long time, i.e. until mid-December 1989, to collect the signatures and send the letter abroad. Nevertheless, the fact that eighteen intellectuals eventually managed to become solidary in their protest in the autumn of 1989 indicates that something had changed by that time: a timid but shared feeling of solidarity was gradually replacing the "egoism of small groups." Nevertheless, it was too late for a dissident movement to take shape and give birth to a political opposition able to fill the power vacuum in the afternoon of 22 December 1989. What some intellectuals managed to do that day was to speak to the large crowds gathered in the Palace Square in downtown Bucharest and argue forcefully and convincingly that the monopoly of the RCP was over. In other words, they told the people that it was not about an anti-Ceaușescu uprising, but about

an anti-Communist revolution. Although short-lived, that was an important moment of the 1989 Romanian revolution.

A key issue concerning the *political cultures of resistance* refers to the working-class revolts and the process of establishing a cross-class alliance against the communist regime. This work distinguishes between “genuine” workers and peasant-workers and argues that distinct subcultures of resistance against the regime developed among these categories of workers throughout the 1970s and 1980s. “Genuine” workers represented a category of workers that severed their roots with countryside: they moved to towns seeking for a better-paid job in industry and thus were dependent on the salary they received. By the end of 1980s, in the conditions of the severe crisis faced by the Ceaușescu regime, this category of workers was compelled to think in terms of biological survival and thus was more prone to engage in open protests. The economic crisis affected to a lesser extent the peasant-workers. During the period of food shortages, i.e. 1981–1989, such people were able to obtain the necessary foodstuffs for survival and thus their potential for protest was lower. The peasant-worker is a good example of a strategy of the individual to survive in the conditions of a severe crisis: a job in industry in the nearby town, and food supplies from the little farm he or she owned in the village.

“Genuine” workers represented the first and most affected segment of society in the conditions of economic crisis. Beginning in the mid-1970s four large and highly industrialized areas of communist Romania – the counties of Constanța, Brașov, Hunedoara, and Timiș – attracted the largest number of internal migrants in the country, many of whom came from remote and less developed regions of Moldavia. In these areas, as the interregional long distance migration figures show, came into being a relatively numerous class of workers relying only on the salary they received in industry – a class of “genuine” workers. Between 1977 and 1989, the most important protests from below occurred in workplaces where “genuine” workers

constituted a majority: in the Jiu Valley (Hunedoara County) in 1977 and in Braşov (the capital of the Braşov County) in 1987. In the late 1980s there were in Romania four highly industrialized urban areas – the counties of Constanţa, Braşov, Hunedoara, and Timiş – where the number of workers coming from other regions of the country was particularly high. When the structural crisis deepened, it affected primarily the category of “genuine” workers in those areas, who suffered from food shortages, strict rationing, and non-payment of wages. It was in one of these areas, i.e. the city of Timişoara, the capital of the Timiş County, that the Romanian revolution of 1989 was sparked.

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This book puts forward an explanatory model for the collapse of the communist regimes in East-Central Europe, applies it consistently to the case of Romania, and answers some crucial questions concerning the causes, nature and outcome of the 1989 events in this country: What happened in December 1989 in Romania? Was it a revolution or a coup d'état? If it was a true revolution, inasmuch as the 1989 events in East-Central Europe can be characterized as revolutions, why it started in Timișoara and why precisely in December 1989? Why violence and bloodshed instead of a "negotiated revolution"? Simply put, the present analysis highlights the specificity of the Romanian revolution and identifies the causes of the sudden demise of the Ceaușescu regime on 22 December 1989 at noon.

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